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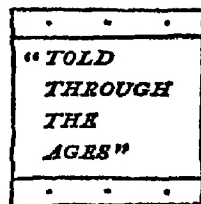


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## THE STORY OF NELSON



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The "Belleisle" went into action at Trafalgar with the words  
"Victory or Death" chalked on her guns

*Fr.*

Frank Craig, from a sketch by C. W. Cole

# THE STORY OF NELSON

BY.

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AND 'THE WAR IN WEXFORD 1798'

AUTHOR OF 'THE STORY OF NAPOLEON' 'THE STORY  
OF LORD ROBERTS' 'THE STORY OF LORD KITCHENER' ETC.

*'He is the only man who has ever lived  
who, by universal consent, is without a peer.'*

ADMIRAL SIR CYPRIAN BRIDGE G.C.B.

GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.  
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**DEDICATED TO**  
**MY FATHER AND MOTHER**



# Foreword

**T**HE career of the little one-eyed, one-armed man who frustrated Napoleon's ambitious maritime plans for the subjugation of England, who is to sailors what Napoleon is to soldiers, who represented in his person all that sea power meant when the very existence of our forefathers was threatened in the latter days of the eighteenth century and the first half-decade of its successor, must ever appeal to those for whom Great Britain means something more than a splash of red on a coloured map.

I do not wish to suggest that his fame is insular. On the contrary, it is universal. Other lands and other peoples share in our admiration of him. We must not forget that it was an American naval officer, Admiral Mahan, who first gave us a really great book about this truly great man. In his "Life of Nelson," we have the hero's career reviewed by an expert whose knowledge of tactics has not blinded him to the more romantic aspects of Nelson's forty-seven years of life. Before its appearance readers were dependent upon the facts and fancies of the biography by Clarke and McArthur, the "Memoirs" of Pettigrew, or the stirring but often inaccurate pictures of Southey. The seven substantial tomes of "Nelson's Letters and Despatches," edited with indefatigable industry by Sir Harris Nicolas, were not compiled for the general public, although they have furnished much material for later historians and must necessarily be the foundation of every modern book on Nelson.

On our own side of the Atlantic there is no more



eminent authority than Sir J. Knox Laughton, Litt.D., Professor of Modern History at King's College, London. He has not only epitomised Nicolas's work, but added to our knowledge by his excellent "Nelson" (English Men of Action Series), "Nelson and his Companions in Arms," and "From Howard to Nelson." His numerous miscellaneous contributions to the subject are also of great interest to the serious student.

Although there is no Nelson cult like that which is associated with the memory of Napoleon, England's great sailor has inspired a considerable literature, as even the shelves of my own library bear witness. There are works on his career as a whole, the campaigns associated with his name, his relations with Lady Hamilton, and so on. The only excuse I can offer for adding to the list is, I hope, a valid one. It seems to me that Nelson's life, told in his own words as much as possible, would specially appeal to the young, and there is, so far as I am aware, no book which does this in the simple manner which I deem to be necessary. For help in carrying out my plan of writing a volume of the kind indicated I am particularly indebted to Nicolas's "Letters" and Prof. Sir J. Knox Laughton's edition of them.

For good or evil the name of Emma, Lady Hamilton, is inextricably associated with that of Nelson. Many and varied have been the attempts to whitewash the character of her whom he regarded as "one of the very best women in the world." While it is difficult to associate the possessor of the beauty which appealed with such irresistible force to such painters as Romney, Reynolds, Lawrence, and Madame Vigée Le Brun, with "a most inherent baseness," it is an indisputable fact that she exercised an adverse influence on Nelson's career. Her humble origin, her loveliness, her poses, her attempts at statecraft, above all, her connection with the great sailor, have made her the subject of almost innumerable volumes. For those who wish to

read an impartial study I would recommend Mr Walter Sichel's "Emma, Lady Hamilton."

Nelson's written communications are not studied literary efforts, but spontaneous expressions of his inmost thoughts. For these reasons they are of inestimable value in an attempt to sum up his life and aims. The kindest of men, he sometimes chose to mix vitriol with his ink. He wrote what he meant, and it was always very much to the point. Less eminent folk have sometimes disguised what they thought and written what they imagined would please. Such was never Nelson's way.

"This high man with a great thing to pursue,"<sup>1</sup> was never a trifler. He recognised the importance of a supreme navy and the supreme importance of its *personnel*. He watched the health of his men as a loving mother watches that of her children. Proof of this is furnished in a Report of the Physician to the Fleet, dated the 14th August 1805.<sup>2</sup> In it Dr Leonard Gillespie says that "the high state of health" was "unexampled perhaps in any fleet or squadron heretofore employed on a foreign station." He attributes this to such causes as the attention paid to the victualling and purveying for the ships; a sane system of heating and ventilation; lack of idleness and intemperance, due to "the constant activity and motion in which the fleet was preserved"; the promotion of cheerfulness by means of music, dancing, and theatrical amusements; comfortable accommodation of the sick; and by the serving of Peruvian bark, mixed in wines or spirits, to men "employed on the service of wooding and watering," which obviated any ill effects.

Nelson was quite able to "stand on his dignity," to use a colloquial and comprehensive phrase, and several instances will be discovered by the reader as he

<sup>1</sup> Robert Browning.

<sup>2</sup> The Report is given in full in Laughton's edition of "Nelson's Letters and Despatches," pp. 409-11. The editor discovered it in the Record Office, Admiral's Despatches, Mediterranean, xxxi. 272.

peruses the following pages, but it is quite wrong to think that he was in the least a martinet. For instance, during the trying period when he was hungering for the French fleet to leave Toulon, he wrote to an officer : " We must all in our several stations exert ourselves to the utmost, and not be nonsensical in saying, ' I have an order for this, that, or the other,' if the king's service clearly marks what ought to be done." Every-one has heard how Nelson referred to his captains and himself as " a band of brothers." You have only to turn to the memoirs of these gallant officers to learn the truthfulness of this remark. They loved him : that is the only term that exactly meets the case.

What of the humbler men who worked the ships ? Read the following, which was sent home by a rough but large-hearted sailor of the *Royal Sovereign*, Collingwood's flagship at Trafalgar, when he heard that the Master Mariner lay cold in the gloomy cockpit of the *Victory* : " Our dear Admiral is killed, so we have paid pretty sharply for licking 'em. I never set eyes on him, for which I am both sorry and glad ; for to be sure I should like to have seen him—but then, all the men in our ship who have seen him are such soft toads, they have done nothing but blast their eyes and cry ever since he was killed. God bless you ! Chaps that fought like the Devil sit down and cry like a wench."

This spontaneous and perhaps unconscious tribute is worth more than the encomiums of all modern historians and biographers put together.

In studying the life of one who has played a leading rôle on the stage of history there are always a number of subsidiary authorities which will repay perusal. The memoirs of the men who were associated with him, of those of his contemporaries who occupied official or high social positions, even of much humbler folk who have transferred their opinions to paper or had it done for them, are oftentimes extremely important. To print a bibliography of the works of this kind which I have consulted would be inadvisable in such a volume

## Foreword

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as this, necessarily limited as it is to a certain number of pages. I need only say that the nooks and crannies have been explored besides the main thoroughfare.

In the Foreword to my companion volume upon Napoleon, I endeavoured to show that periods of history are merely make-believe divisions for purposes of clearness and reference. I wish to still further emphasise this extremely important point, because I find that one of our most cherished delusions is that history is largely a matter of dates. Nothing of the kind! Those who think thus are confusing history with chronology—in other words, mistaking one of the eyes for the whole body. Dates are merely useful devices similar to the numerals on the dial of a clock, which enable us to know the hour of the day without abstruse calculations. The figures 1805 help us to memorise a certain concrete event, such as the battle of Trafalgar, but they do not tell us anything of the origin of that event any more than a clock defines the meaning of time.

The age in which Nelson lived was not conspicuous for its morals. This is a factor which must be taken into consideration when we attempt to sum up his character. The standards of 1911 are scarcely the standards of over a century ago. The code of virtue varies, although the law does not. The grave of Nelson's moral reputation was dug in Sicily, where he had every provocation, but he certainly never attempted to extricate himself from the pit into which he had fallen. "*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*" is a good maxim for the Gospel of Things as they Ought to Be, but cannot apply to the Testament of Things as they Were. The vanity of both Nelson and Lady Hamilton contributed to their downfall, the sordid story of which is necessarily referred to in later pages of this work. I am of opinion that the lack of sympathy shown to the Admiral, particularly during Pitt's administrations, was largely due to Court influence. George III. was a man of frigid austerity, and Nelson's private life was too well

## The Story of Nelson

known for the King to countenance it by showing him favours. He recognised the value of the man's services, but preferred to take as little notice as possible of the man himself. In this he was unjust.

Although Nelson hated the French so vehemently, I cannot help thinking, after a prolonged study of his career, that he had many of their characteristics. His vivacity, his imagination, his moods tend to confirm me in this. A less typical specimen of John Bull would be difficult to find.

A word or two concerning Nelson's crowning victory and then I must bring my lengthy introduction to a conclusion. It has a literature all its own. A wordy warfare, which was indulged in the correspondence columns of the *Times* from July to October 1905, made one almost believe that it is easier to fight a battle than to describe it accurately. To use Prof. Sir J. Knox Laughton's terse phrase, "the difficulty is that the traditional account of the battle differs, in an important detail, from the prearranged plan." The late Admiral Colomb held a brief for the theory that the two columns of the British fleet moved in line abreast, or in line of bearing, as against the old supposition of two columns, line ahead. In this contention, he is supported by Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge, G.C.B., whose ideas are set forth in a pamphlet issued by the Navy Records Society, an institution which is doing excellent work in rescuing historical documents relating to the service from ill-deserved oblivion. To add further to the discussion would probably serve no useful purpose. The second volume of "Logs of the Great Sea-fights (1794-1805)," and "Fighting Instructions, 1580-1816," both published by the Society already mentioned, will be found extremely useful to those who would pursue the subject in detail.

Tennyson's "Mighty Seaman" has been apotheosised in poetry as well as in prose,

*"For he is Britain's Admiral  
Till setting of her sun,"*

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to quote Meredith's superb lines. Wordsworth, Scott, Rossetti, Henley, Swinburne, Newbolt and others have said noble things of the Man of Duty, while Nelson looms large in Thomas Hardy's magnificent epic, "The Dynasts." No one who has read it is likely to forget :

*"In the wild October night-time, when the wind raved round the land,  
And the Back-Sea met the Front-Sea, and our doors were blocked with  
sand,  
And we heard the drub of Deadman's Bay, where the bones of thousands  
are,  
We knew not what the day had done for us at Trafalgar.*

*(ALL) Had done,  
Had done,  
For us at Trafalgar !*

*The victors and the vanquished then the storm it tossed and tore,  
As hard they strove, those worn-out men, upon that surly shore ;  
Dead Nelson and his half-dead crew, his foes from near and far,  
Were rolled together on the deep that night at Trafalgar.*

*(ALL) The deep,  
The deep,  
That night at Trafalgar !"*



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*For ages past our admirals brave  
Pre-eminent have stood ;  
And, spite of all the world, have held  
The mastery of the flood,  
Howe, Duncan, Hood,  
And Collingwood,  
Long triumph'd o'er the main ;  
While Nelson's name,  
So dear to Fame !—  
We may never see their like again*



## Chapter I—Boyhood and First Years at Sea (1758-1773)

**T**HUS<sup>1</sup> runs one of the verses of a song dear to the British sailor for many a long year. Nelson, dead over a century, is still revered in the King's Navy. To the landsman there is no more popular hero. The *Victory*, riding at anchor in the placid waters of the Solent and in view of the cobble-covered sally port through which the Hero walked to his barge, still flies an admiral's flag. One of the most modern battleships in the service bears his name, the most famous of London's many columns is crowned by his effigy. Canvas sails have given place to steam turbines, the days of oak and hemp are gone, but the memory of "the greatest sea captain of all time" is at once an incentive and an inspiration to every true patriot. His ashes lie in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral; his spirit lives in the nation for whom he sacrificed his life. Perhaps we should not be far wrong in venturing the apparent paradox that the further we recede from

The headpiece, a sketch by Mr W. L. Wyllie, R.A., is printed by permission of the Art Union of London, 112 Strand.

<sup>1</sup> See lines on page opposite.

his life and times the more clearly we understand his consummate genius and appreciate the value of his achievements. There is no sunset, only an added glory with the passing of the years.

Horatio Nelson was born in the quaint old parsonage house of Burnham Thorpe, a Norfolk Sleepy Hollow, on the 29th September 1758. His father, the Rev. Edmund Nelson, M.A., was rector of the parish, and as a clergyman was following the profession of his immediate ancestor. His mother, Catherine Nelson, was the daughter of the Rev. Dr Maurice Suckling, Rector of Wooton, Norfolk, Prebendary of Westminster, and grandnephew of Sir John Suckling, whose name is known to all students of English literature and of history. Galfridus Walpole, another of Mrs Nelson's relatives, had displayed considerable bravery in an engagement with the French in Vado Bay in 1711. It was through Captain Maurice Suckling, Nelson's uncle, that the young son of the parsonage eventually entered the Navy. In addition, his mother was a grandniece of Sir Robert Walpole, the famous Whig statesman, and could therefore boast a distinguished lineage.

Horatio was the sixth child of a constantly growing family, and early caused anxiety owing to his delicate constitution. In later years his letters and despatches teem with reference to his ill-health, which was accentuated, of course, by injuries which he received in the performance of his duty. However, he breathed deeply of the North Sea air which wafted through his native village, was tenderly cared for by loving parents, and became sufficiently robust to be sent to the High School at Norwich. The venerable building, endowed by Edward VI., stands within the cathedral precincts. It is now fronted by a statue of its illustrious scholar. Later he attended a school at North Walsham, now one of the yachting centres of the Norfolk Broads, where the curious will find a brick on which the letters H. N. are scratched.

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It is somewhat remarkable that so few boys who become great men ever attract sufficient notice during their early scholastic career for their comrades to remember anecdotes about them likely to be of assistance to the biographer. Few anecdotes of Nelson in his younger days have been handed down to posterity, but the following have probably some basis of fact.

When quite a small boy he stayed for a time with his grandmother. On one occasion he did not return at the accustomed dinner-hour, thereby causing the good dame considerable anxiety, especially as gipsies were in the neighbourhood and kidnapping was by no means unknown. He was eventually found seated on the banks of a brook examining with considerable interest a number of birds' eggs he had secured in company with a chum. "I wonder, child, that fear did not drive you home!" the old lady said when the missing Horatio was restored to her. "Fear, grandmamma!" he replied in a tone of disgust, "I never saw fear—what is it?"

There you have the secret of Nelson's life summed up in a single pregnant sentence. His total lack of fear carried him through many a trying ordeal, enabled him at times to defy the command of a senior officer when he was convinced that his own plan of operations was better, and helped him to bear the heat and burden of the day when his physical energy was almost exhausted.

On another occasion he was "dared" by some companions to visit the graveyard unattended at night. As a token of good faith he was to bring a wig from a certain yew tree at the south-west corner of All Saints' Church. The uncanny task was successfully accomplished. From thenceforth he was a hero, as he deserved to be.

A further instance of Nelson's early lack of fear is afforded us. His master at North Walsham was particularly proud of a certain pear-tree, and his scholars were equally covetous of the delicious fruit which it

bore. Each preferred the other in the task of picking any of the pears because of the speedy retribution which they knew would follow. One night Horatio volunteered the task. His friends tied several sheets together and lowered him from the dormitory to the garden. He swarmed up the tree, secured the forbidden and therefore much prized fruit, and was hauled up again. On distributing the booty, he justified his action in his own mind by assuring the recipients that he had only taken the pears "because every other boy was afraid." Few hours passed before the school-master found that his tree had been plundered. It redounds to the credit of the boys that they refused to "split" on their comrade, although it is said that a tempting reward was offered for the discovery of the culprit.

One winter morning Horatio and his brother William set out for school on their ponies. They had not gone very far before they found the snow so deep as to be almost impassable. They returned to the Parsonage and told their father of the great drifts. He persuaded them to try again, adding that he left it to their honour not to turn back unless it was absolutely necessary.

The snow was falling in heavy flakes when they made their second attempt. William's heart soon failed him. He suggested that they had sufficient reason to return. Horatio was as adamant. "Father left it to our honour. We must go forward," he replied, and in due course they arrived at the school.

William, who was the elder by seventeen months, had the greatest affection and esteem for his brother. In later years he was his constant correspondent, and after Horatio's death he was created Earl Nelson of Trafalgar. Like his father and grandfather, William became a clergyman, in which profession he rose to the dignity of Prebendary and Vice Dean of Canterbury.

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It was during the Christmas vacation of 1770 that Nelson casually picked up a newspaper and read of Captain Maurice Suckling's appointment to the *Raisonnable*, a ship of sixty-four guns. The announcement seems to have had an instant effect upon Horatio. "Oh, William," he exclaimed to his brother, who was standing near, "do, *do* write to father, and tell him that I want to go to sea with uncle!"

The Rev. Edmund Nelson was staying at Bath owing to ill-health. When he received his son's letter he was inclined to dismiss the proposition as a mere boyish whim. On thinking it over a little more carefully he decided that perhaps the youngster really desired what he asked, and he accordingly consulted his brother-in-law on the matter. The officer replied in the easy-going manner of sailors, "Well, let him come and have his head knocked off by the first cannon-ball—that will provide for him." He was afraid Horatio would never be able to stand the rough-and-ready life, but he had the good sense to know that there is nothing like putting a theory to a practical test.

The Navy was not then the skilfully-organised machine it has since become. It was one of the privileges of a captain that he might take two or three lads to sea with him as midshipmen or to serve in some subordinate position. Captain Suckling accordingly sent for Horatio, and we find his name on the ship's books under date of the 1st January 1771. The *Raisonnable* was then anchored in the Medway.

The lad's father accompanied his twelve-year-old son as far as London, put him into the Chatham stage-coach, and then left him to his own resources. It was neither a pleasant journey in the rambling old carriage, nor were the streets of Chatham particularly inviting when he set foot in them. Nobody met the adventurer, and for some time he wandered about until he met an officer who directed him to the ship which was to be his temporary home. When he was safely



on board it was to find that his uncle had not arrived.<sup>1</sup>

The *Raisonnable* was one of the vessels commissioned when hostilities between Great Britain and Spain appeared imminent owing to trouble respecting the Falkland Islands, a group in the South Atlantic. In 1770 Spain had insulted the British colonists there by compelling the garrison at Fort Egmont to lower their flag. The matter was settled amicably, for the all-sufficient reason that Spain did not feel strong enough to come to blows with Great Britain unless she was assisted by France, and as the support of that Power was not forthcoming, she climbed down. Consequently Nelson was not introduced to the horrors of naval warfare at this early stage, and the cannon-ball which his uncle prophesied would knock off the lad's head did not leave the cannon's mouth.

When the *Raisonnable* was paid off Captain Suckling was given command of the guard-ship *Triumph* (74), stationed in the Medway, and recognising that no good could come to his nephew by staying on such a vessel, he secured a position for him shortly afterwards in a merchant ship bound for the West Indies. This was not a difficult matter, because the Master was John Rathbone, who had served with Suckling on the *Dreadnought* during part of the Seven Years' War, that great struggle in which Louis XV. of France had been forced to cede Canada to Great Britain.

Nelson seems to have enjoyed the experience. In a sketch of his life, which he wrote several years later for the *Naval Chronicle*, he says :

"From this voyage I returned to the *Triumph* at Chatham in July 1772 ; and, if I did not improve in my education, I returned a practical seaman, with a horror of the Royal Navy, and with a saying, then

<sup>1</sup> A Chippendale arm-chair, which was given to Nelson by his great grandfather, was presented by the boy to Mrs Luckins, his nurse, when he left home to join the Navy. It appeared in an auction room so recently as 1908.

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constant with the seamen, 'Aft the most honour, forward the better man!' It was many weeks before I got in the least reconciled to a man-of-war, so deep was the prejudice rooted; and what pains were taken to instil this erroneous principle in a young mind! However, as my ambition was to be a seaman, it was always held out as a reward, that if I attended well to my navigation, I should go in the cutter and decked long-boat, which was attached to the commanding officer's ship at Chatham. Thus by degrees I became a good pilot, for vessels of that description, from Chatham to the Tower of London, down the Swin, and to the North Foreland; and confident of myself amongst rocks and sands, which has many times since been of the very greatest comfort to me. In this way I was trained, till the expedition towards the North Pole was fitted out; when, although no boys were allowed to go in the ships (as of no use), yet nothing could prevent my using every interest to go with Captain Lutwidge in the *Carcass*; and, as I fancied I was to fill a man's place, I begged I might be his coxswain: which, finding my ardent desire for going with him, Captain Lutwidge complied with, and has continued the strictest friendship to this moment. Lord Mulgrave, who I then first knew, continued his kindest friendship and regard to the last moment of his life. When the boats were fitted out to quit the two ships blocked up in the ice, I exerted myself to have the command of a four-oared cutter raised upon, which was given me, with twelve men; and I prided myself in fancying I could navigate her better than any other boat in the ship."

In this cold, matter-of-fact way, Nelson dismisses a phase of his life fraught with peril and adventure. When the majority, if not all, of his former school-fellows were reading of the doings of gallant seamen and brave soldiers he was undergoing actual experiences. The expedition in question had been suggested by the Royal Society, and was commanded by Captain

Constantine John Phipps, eldest son of Lord Mulgrave. The *Racehorse* and *Carcass*, heavy ships known as bombs because they mounted one or more mortars for use in bombardments when on ordinary service, sailed from the Nore on the 4th June 1778. All went well until the 31st July, when the ice closed upon the vessels, and further progress became impossible.

"The following day," says Colonel J. M. Tucker in his "*Life and Naval Memoirs of Lord Nelson*," "there was not the smallest opening, the ships were within less than two lengths of each other. The ice, which the day before had been flat, and almost level with the water's edge, was now in many places forced higher than the mainyard by the pieces squeezing together. A day of thick fog followed; it was succeeded by clear weather; but the passage by which the ships had entered from the westward was closed, and no open water was in sight, either in that or any other quarter. By the pilot's advice, the men were set to cut a passage and warp<sup>1</sup> through the small openings to the westward. They sawed through pieces of ice twelve feet thick; and this labour continued the whole day, during which their utmost efforts did not move the ships above three hundred yards, while they were driven together, with the ice, far to the north-east and east by the current. Sometimes a field of several acres square would be lifted up between two larger islands, and incorporated with them; and thus these larger pieces continued to grow by cohesive aggregation. Another day passed, and there seemed no probability of getting the ships out, without a strong east or north-east wind.

"The season was far advanced, and every hour lessened the chance of extricating themselves. Young as he was, Nelson was appointed to command one of the boats which were sent out to explore a passage into the open water. It was the means of saving a boat belonging to the *Racehorse* from a singular but imminent danger. Some of the officers had fired at, and wounded,

<sup>1</sup> In other words, tow the vessels.



Nelson and the Bear  
Stephen Reid



## Boyhood and First Years at Sea 27

a walrus. . . . The wounded animal dived immediately, and brought up a number of its companions; and they all joined in an attack upon the boat. They wrested an oar from one of the men; and it was with the utmost difficulty that the crew could prevent them from staving or upsetting her, till the *Carcass's* boat, under Nelson, came up. The walrusses, finding their enemies thus reinforced, dispersed.

"A short time after this occurrence, young Nelson exposed himself in a more daring manner. One night, during the mid-watch, he stole from the ship with one of his comrades, taking advantage of a rising fog, and set out over the ice in pursuit of a bear. Nelson, in high spirits, led the way over the frightful chasms in the ice, armed with a rusty musket, as was his companion. It was not, however, long before the adventurers were missed by those on board; and, as the fog had much increased, the anxiety of Captain Lutwidge and his officers for them was very great. Between three and four in the morning, the mist having nearly dispersed, the hunters were discovered at a considerable distance, attacking a large bear. The signal for their return was instantly made; but it was in vain that Nelson's companion urged him to obey it. He was at this time divided by a rent in the ice from his shaggy antagonist, which probably saved his life; for the musket had flashed in the pan, and their ammunition was expended. 'Never mind,' exclaimed Horatio, 'do but let me get a blow at this devil with the butt end of my musket, and we shall have him.' His companion, finding that entreaty was in vain, left him, and regained the ship. The Captain, seeing the young adventurer's danger, ordered a gun to be fired to terrify the enraged animal; this had the desired effect; but Nelson was obliged to return without his bear. Captain Lutwidge, though he could not but admire so daring a disposition, reprimanded him rather sternly for such rashness, and for conduct so unworthy of the situation he occupied; and desired to know what motive he

could have for hunting a bear. 'Sir,' he replied, pouting his lip, as he was wont to do when agitated, 'I wished to kill a bear, that I might carry its skin to my father.' "

Towards the middle of August the two ships were able to forge their way through the ice, although not without considerable difficulty, and duly sailed for home waters.

## CHAPTER II

### A Hero in the Making

(1778-1783)

*" True honour, I hope, predominates in my mind far above riches "*

—NELSON.

WE are fortunate in having an account of Nelson's early career at sea penned by himself, otherwise the material at our disposal would be extremely scanty. The story of the next few years is therefore told in his own words. What it lacks in picturesqueness is made up for in authenticity :

" On our arrival in England," he says, " and paid off, 15 October [1778], I found that a squadron was fitting out for the East Indies ; and nothing less than such a distant voyage could in the least satisfy my desire of maritime knowledge : and I was placed in the *Seahorse* of 20 guns, with Captain Farmer, and watched in the foretop ; from whence in time I was placed on the quarter-deck : having, in the time I was in this ship, visited almost every part of the East Indies, from Bengal to Bussorah. Ill-health induced Sir Edward Hughes, who had always shown me the greatest kindness, to send me to England in the *Dolphin* of 20 guns, with Captain James Pigot, whose kindness at that time saved my life. This ship was paid off at Woolwich on 24 September, 1776. On the 26th I received an order from Sir James Douglas, who commanded at Portsmouth, to act as lieutenant of the *Worcester*, 64, Captain Mark Robinson, who was ordered



to Gibraltar with a convoy.<sup>1</sup> In this ship I was at sea with convoys till 2 April, 1777, and in very bad weather. But although my age might have been a sufficient cause for not entrusting me with the charge of a watch, yet Captain Robinson used to say, 'he felt as easy when I was upon deck, as any officer in the ship.'

"On [the 9th] April, 1777, I passed my examination as a lieutenant; and received my commission the next day, as second lieutenant of the *Lowestoffe* frigate of 32 guns, Captain (now Lieutenant-Governor of Greenwich Hospital) William Locker. In this ship I went to Jamaica; but even a frigate was not sufficiently active for my mind, and I got into a schooner, tender to the *Lowestoffe*. In this vessel I made myself a complete pilot for all the passages through the (Keys) Islands situated on the north side [of] Hispaniola. Whilst in this frigate, an event happened which presaged my character; and, as it conveys no dishonour to the officer alluded to, I shall relate it.

"Blowing a gale of wind, and very heavy sea, the frigate captured an American letter of marque.<sup>2</sup> The first lieutenant was ordered to board her, which he did not, owing to the very high sea. On his return on board, the captain said, 'Have I no officer in the ship who can board the prize?' On which the master ran to the gangway, to get into the boat; when I stopped him, saying, 'It is my turn now; and if I come back, it is yours.' This little incident has often occurred to my mind; and I know it is my disposition, that difficulties and dangers do but increase my desire of attempting them.

"Sir Peter Parker, soon after his arrival at Jamaica, 1778, took me into his own flag-ship, the *Bristol*, as third lieutenant; from which I rose by succession to be first. Nothing particular happened whilst I was

<sup>1</sup> Ships of war sent to accompany merchantmen during hostilities so as to protect them from the enemy.

<sup>2</sup> A private vessel commissioned to attack and capture the vessels of an enemy.

## A Hero in the Making 31

in this ship, which was actively employed off Cape François, being the commencement of the French war."

A few words with reference to the hostilities mentioned are needed as explanation. The war between Great Britain and her colonists in North America, which culminated in the birth of a new World-Power, now known as the United States, had broken out in 1775, although the seeds of dissension had been sown much earlier. This unfortunate and disastrous quarrel had also embroiled "the mother of nations" in a strife with France and Spain, whose help the New Englanders secured in 1778 and 1779 respectively. In 1780 Holland became involved. The foolishness of not having sufficiently watched the doings of a potential enemy now became apparent. For several years "resolute Choiseul, the abrupt proud man" of Carlyle, had bent his energies on increasing the French navy, and when the Brest fleet of thirty-two sail-of-the-line, under Count D'Orvilliers, met the British fleet of thirty sail, under Vice-Admiral the Hon. A. Keppel, off Ushant on the 27th July 1778, the action was indecisive. In American waters Lord Howe hove in sight of the fleet under D'Estaing, the French commander having better ships and heavier metal, but while Howe was manœuvring to attack the enemy a storm parted the would-be contestants. Both suffered considerable damage by wind and not by shot as had been anticipated. Shortly afterwards Admiral Byron took over Howe's command and endeavoured to come up with D'Estaing's ships. Unfortunately the Frenchman had sailed to the West Indies, which "in this protracted contest," to use the words of Admiral Mahan, was to be "the chief scene of naval hostilities. . . ." "The West Indies is the Station for honour," said Nelson sometime later. Froude, the historian, predicted that "If ever the naval exploits of this country are done into an epic poem—and since the *Iliad* there has been no subject better fitted for such treatment or better deserving it—the West Indies will be the scene of the most brilliant

cantos." We shall have occasion to refer to this great strategic point many times in these pages, especially in the great game of hide-and-seek between Napoleon's captains and Nelson immediately preceding the Trafalgar campaign.<sup>1</sup> The year 1778 was not a brilliant one in British naval annals, although it closed by Hotham and Barrington attacking D'Estaing off St Lucia and preventing him from landing more than half the troops intended for the subjugation of that island. As a consequence the force under Chevalier de Michaud surrendered, and St Lucia was won.

"On 8 December, 1778," Nelson continues, "I was appointed commander of the *Badger* brig; and was first sent to protect the Mosquito shore, and the Bay of Honduras, from the depredations of the American privateers. Whilst on this service, I gained so much the affections of the settlers, that they unanimously voted me their thanks, and expressed their regret on my leaving them; entrusting to me to describe to Sir Peter Parker and Sir John Dalling their situation, should a war with Spain break out. Whilst I commanded this brig, H.M.S. *Glasgow*, Captain Thomas Lloyd, came into Montego Bay, Jamaica, where the *Badger* was laying: in two hours afterwards she took fire by a cask of rum; and Captain Lloyd will tell you, that it was owing to my exertions, joined to his, that her whole crew were rescued from the flames."

This stirring incident merits a more detailed description than the bare facts which Nelson chose to set forth. The crew was in a panic when he and his men set foot on the deck of the doomed vessel, and by almost superhuman exertions managed to throw all the gunpowder in the magazine overboard before the flames reached it. He also ordered that the loaded cannon should be directed upward, so that when they exploded, owing to the intense heat, no damage would result. Thus early in his career did Nelson show that he was not at a loss when the unusual and unexpected

<sup>1</sup> See *post*, Chapter xix.

## A Hero in the Making 33

happened. In a letter to Captain Locker, who was ill, the young officer describes the fate of the *Glasgow* as "a most shocking sight; and had it happened half an hour later, in all probability a great many people would have been lost." He also notes that the company of the derelict were falling ill very fast owing to the constant tropical rains to which the men were exposed, there being no room for them on the *Badger*.

"On 11 June, 1779," Nelson continues, "I was made post into the *Hinchinbrook*. When, being at sea, and Count d'Estaing arriving at Hispaniola (Haïti) with a very large fleet and army from Martinique, an attack on Jamaica was expected. In this critical state, I was by both admiral and general entrusted with the command of the batteries at Port Royal; and I need not say, as the defence of this place was the key to the port of the whole naval force, the town of Kingston, and Spanish Town, it was the most important post in the whole island."

D'Estaing's fleet consisted of twenty-two sail-of-the-line, excluding transports and privateers which had attached themselves to him, and it was commonly reported that he had no fewer than 20,000 troops on board. Nelson, as noted above, was now Post-Captain, and although he had no occasion to prove his ability as a commander of land batteries, he seems to have taken kindly to the situation. In a letter to his friend Captain Parker, dated the 12th August 1779, he states that "Jamaica is turned upside down since you left it," and furnishes particulars of the measures made for the defence of the island. "You must not be surprised to hear of my learning to speak French," he remarks as a humorous aside.

To help to achieve the downfall of the wily d'Estaing was not to fall to Nelson's lot. That worthy hastened to Savannah, which was attacked by troops under General Lincoln and himself. They were routed by the British lines, whereupon d'Estaing sailed away.

Great Britain was now at war with Spain, which had

thrown in her lot with France, and was soon to feel the effects of the Armed Neutrality, consisting of Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, and Prussia. They resented England's right to search neutral ships, with the result that the latter Power could not retain her supremacy at sea, a cause of Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown and the consequent loss of the American Colonies. In January 1780 it was resolved to make an attempt to take the important post of Fort San Juan, on the river of that name. This would materially aid the British to secure the city of Granada, on Lake Nicaragua, and to sever the communications of the enemy between their northern and southern dominions. The idea originated with Dalling, Governor of Jamaica, to whom history has scarcely done justice. The naval force was entrusted to Nelson, the command of the troops to Captain John Polson.

The soldiers at the disposal of the intrepid adventurers were a mere handful, scarcely 500 in all, but perhaps that fact added the necessary spice of danger. Nelson left his ship, and "carried troops in boats one hundred miles up a river, which none but Spaniards since the time of the buccaneers had ever ascended," to use his own words. He "boarded" an outpost of the enemy, situated on an island in the river; "made batteries, and afterwards fought them, and was a principal cause of our success." When the miniature expedition arrived at Fort San Juan the rainy season had commenced, bringing malaria in its train. Nelson was all for making an immediate attack, but Polson ruled the slower, and perhaps surer, method of erecting batteries and so forth, in which Nelson lent a willing hand. "I want words to express the obligations I owe to Captain Nelson," Polson told Governor Dalling. "He was the first on every service, whether by day or night. There was not a gun fired but was pointed by him, or by Captain Despard, Chief Engineer." Fever played havoc with the men; of the 200 sailors of the *Hinchinbrook*, no fewer than "eighty-seven took to

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their beds in one night; and of the two hundred, one hundred and forty-five were buried in mine and Captain Collingwood's<sup>1</sup> time: and I believe very few, not more than ten, survived of that ship's crew; a proof how necessary expedition is in those climates." Nelson's own health was undermined by dysentery. A few hours before the Spanish flag gave place to the Union Jack he left the region of the fort in order to join the *Janus* (44 guns), of which he had been given command. The ship being stationed at Jamaica, he was taken to Port Royal in a sloop. Here he met with a good and tender-hearted friend in Lady Parker, the wife of Sir Peter Parker, Commander-in-Chief at Jamaica, but he gained so little in strength that he was compelled to ask leave of absence and leave the West Indies for England. Had he stayed it is improbable that he could have rendered useful service while in such a low condition. The expedition eventually ended in failure. He sailed on the 4th September 1780 in the *Lion*, commanded by Captain the Hon. William Cornwallis, a younger son of Earl Cornwallis, who acted the part of nurse to the patient's entire satisfaction, and cemented a friendship which lasted until Nelson's death.

Having to resign the *Janus* probably caused Nelson more torture than his physical suffering, for he was intensely ambitious. It is stated that when he arrived in England he would not proceed to Bath to drink the waters until he had been conveyed to the Admiralty to beg for another vessel. "This they readily promised me," he observed in a humorous way, "thinking it not possible for me to live." At Bath he stayed with Mr Spry, an apothecary, who resided at 2 Pierrepont Street; his medical adviser was Dr Woodward.

On the 23rd January 1781 Nelson was able to inform Captain Locker that he was "now upon the mending hand," although he had been "obliged to be carried to and from bed, with the most excruciating tortures." Some three weeks later further progress was reported:

<sup>1</sup> Nelson's success or end friend.

"My health, thank God, is very near perfectly restored ; and I have the perfect use of all my limbs, except my left arm, which I can hardly tell what is the matter with it. From the shoulder to my fingers' ends are as if half dead ; but the surgeon and doctors give me hopes it will all go off. I most sincerely wish to be employed, and hope it will not be long."

Again the flicker of ambition is evident, always a good sign in a patient. "I never was so well in health that I can remember," he writes on the 5th March. On Monday of the following week he began his return journey to London. Unfortunately his progress was intermittent. He had "good" days and "bad" days. Two months later we find Nelson telling his beloved brother William that he has entirely lost the use of his left arm and nearly of his left leg and thigh. However, the surgeon who was attending him gave him hopes of recovery, "when I will certainly come into Norfolk, and spend my time there till I am employed."

At this period Nelson did not have to eat out his heart in chagrin and disappointment owing to neglect as some of our modern naval officers have had to do. In August 1781, when his health had improved, he was given command of the *Albemarle*, a frigate of 28 guns, and on the 28rd of that month he hoisted his pennant at Woolwich. The appearance of the little vessel pleased him considerably, his officers and men even more so, as his letters abundantly testify. "My quarter-deck is filled, much to my satisfaction, with very genteel young men and seamen"; "I have an exceeding good ship's company. Not a man or officer in her I would wish to change"; "I am perfectly satisfied with both officers and ship's company. All my marines are likewise old standers," are some of his remarks to correspondents. We must not imagine that Nelson necessarily had a pattern-ship and a pattern-crew because of the kind things he said of them. His recent recovery from serious illness has doubtless to

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be taken into consideration. We all see the world and its inhabitants through rose-coloured glasses after an enforced absence from the ordinary duties and modes of life. A natural sweetness of disposition may also partly account for his optimism. In later years Samuel Rogers, the Banker-poet, recorded in his entertaining "Table Talk" that "Lord Nelson was a remarkably kind-hearted man. I have seen him spin a teetotum with his *one* hand, a whole evening, for the amusement of some children."

The young captain's first voyage in the *Albemarle* was not unattended by adventures. His reference to his experiences in the Autobiography is slightly tinged with a semi-humorous cynicism one can readily forgive, although it contrasts oddly with the remarks just quoted. "In August, 1781," he writes, "I was commissioned for the *Albemarle*; and, it would almost be supposed, to try my constitution, was kept the whole winter in the North Sea." He cruised to Elsinore, where he found a number of vessels waiting for convoy to Portsmouth and Plymouth. "We have not had any success;" he complains, "indeed, there is nothing you can meet, but what is in force: the Dutch have not a single merchantman at sea. One privateer was in our fleet, but it was not possible to lay hold of him. I chased him an hour, and came fast up with him, but was obliged to return to the fleet. I find since, it was the noted Fall, the pirate. . . . What fools the Dutch must have been not to have taken us into the Texel. Two hundred and sixty sail the convoy consisted of."

On another occasion the British ships in the Downs mistook Nelson and his motley collection for a Dutch fleet. Many of the sail-of-the-line prepared for action and would have chased their friends had not Nelson sent a cutter to inform the officers of their ludicrous error. In the early days of 1782 the *Albemarle* was ordered to Portsmouth to take in eight months' provisions, "and I have no doubt was meant to go to the



East Indies with Sir Richard Bickerton,<sup>1</sup> which I should have liked exceedingly, but alas, how short-sighted are the best of us." The young captain then goes on to tell his brother William of the fate which overtook him. During a fierce gale an East India store ship collided with the *Albermarle*. "We have lost our foremast, and bowsprit, mainyard, larboard cathead, and quarter gallery, the ship's [figure] head, and stove in two places on the larboard side—all done in five minutes. What a change! but yet we ought to be thankful we did not founder. We have been employed since in getting jury-masts, yards, and bowsprit, and stopping the holes in our sides. What is to become of us now, I know not. She must go into dock, and I fear must be paid off, she has received so much damage."

A letter to the same correspondent, dated the 8th February 1782, reveals something of Nelson's philosophy of life. "We all rise by deaths," he asserts. "I got my rank by a shot killing a post-captain, and I most sincerely hope I shall, when I go, go out of [the] world the same way; then we go all in the line of our profession—a parson praying, a captain fighting." He had his wish gratified, as we all know. There was something more than a suspicion of the Stoic in Nelson, for while it cannot be said that he was unaffected by passion, he certainly displayed praiseworthy indifference to creature comforts when at sea. That he grumbled to the authorities proves nothing to the contrary. It was usually with reference to half-unseaworthy ships, which added to the trials and troubles of his men and oftentimes precluded him from doing himself justice where the enemy was concerned. His letters prove conclusively that he had the utmost faith in God, whom he regarded as a powerful Ally.

Shortly afterwards Nelson sailed with a convoy to

<sup>1</sup> Sir Richard Bickerton (1727-92) sailed from England with a convoy on the 6th February 1782. He took part in an indecisive engagement with Suffrein, off Pondicherry, on the 20th June 1783. Not more than two-thirds of the British crews were effective owing to scurvy.

Newfoundland and Quebec. The experience was anything but pleasant, and when he returned to the latter place in the middle of September he was "knocked up with scurvy," the old-time sailor's curse, owing to a diet of salt beef for eight weeks. "In the end," he says, "our cruise has been an unsuccessful one; we have taken, seen, and destroyed more enemies than is seldom done in the same space of time, but not one arrived in port. But, however, I do not repine at our loss: we have in other things been very fortunate, for on 14 August we fell in with, in Boston Bay, four sail-of-the-line,<sup>1</sup> and the *Iris*, French man-of-war, part of M. Vaudreuil's squadron, who gave us a pretty dance for between nine or ten hours; but we beat all except the frigate, and though we brought to for her, after we were out of sight of the line-of-battle ships, she tacked and stood from us. Our escape I think wonderful: they were, upon the clearing up of a fog, within shot of us, and chased us the whole time about one point from the wind. . . ." Nelson managed to avoid the enemy by "running them amongst the shoals of St George's Bank," a manœuvre which caused the larger ships to stop pursuit. When he prepared for action the commander of the frigate, deeming discretion the better part of valour, wisely decided to rejoin his comrades.

After taking another convoy from Quebec to New York, Nelson sailed under the command of Lord Hood for the West Indies, "the grand theatre of actions." Here he captured a French vessel attached to Vaudreuil's fleet, thereby getting some compensation for the loss of the frigate. Her cargo consisted of naval material, and as some of the British ships were urgently in want of topmasts the prize was more than usually valuable.

He also attempted to recapture Turk's Island, which had been taken by the French. The proceeding was audacious in the extreme, as he had very few ships at his disposal. An officer was sent on shore, under cover

<sup>1</sup> In his Autobiography Nelson gives the number as three.

of a flag of truce, to demand surrender. This proving abortive, a little band of 167 seamen and marines, under Captain Charles Dixon, was landed. The *Admiral Barrington* then came up, and together with the *Drake*, was about to bombard the town, when a concealed battery opened upon them. A steady fire was maintained for an hour before Captain Dixon, who had hoped to reach the enemy's works while the ships were engaging some of the French defenders, decided that the experiment was too dangerous. The enemy's guns were fought by seamen, the troops had several field-pieces at their disposal, and two pieces of cannon were mounted on a hill, consequently continued persistence would have been foolhardy. "With such a force," says the instigator of this expedition, "and their strong position, I did not think anything further could be attempted."

Nelson succeeded in making himself thoroughly acquainted with Lord Hood, who in his turn introduced him to Prince William, then a midshipman and afterwards William IV., "our Sailor King." There was mutual admiration. "He will be, I am certain, an ornament to our Service," Nelson tells Locker. "He is a seaman, which you could hardly suppose. Every other qualification you may expect from him. But he will be a disciplinarian, and a strong one: he says he is determined every person shall serve his time before they shall be provided for, as he is obliged to serve his." Such is Nelson's comment. That of the future monarch was not made at the time, but when Nelson went on board the *Barfleur* the incident made such an impression on the Prince that he was able to paint a graphic word-picture of the event many years after. Nelson "appeared to be the merest boy of a captain I ever beheld. . . . He had on a full-laced uniform; his lank, unpowdered hair was tied in a stiff Hessian tail, of an extraordinary length; the old-fashioned flaps of his waistcoat added to the general quaintness of his figure, and produced an appearance which par-

ticularly attracted my notice; for I had never seen anything like it before, nor could I imagine who he was, nor what he came about. My doubts were, however, removed when Lord Hood introduced me to him. There was something irresistibly pleasing in his address and conversation; and an enthusiasm when speaking on professional subjects that showed he was no common being. . . . Throughout the whole of the American War the height of Nelson's ambition was to command a line-of-battle ship; as for prize-money, it never entered his thoughts: he had always in view the character of his maternal uncle."

On the 25th June 1783 Nelson was again at Portsmouth. After seeing to the well-being of his sailors he travelled on the leisurely stage-coach to London, where he was presented to the King by Lord Hood. In the following September hostilities were concluded between Great Britain, America, France, Spain, and Holland by the signature of the Treaty of Versailles. The officer, therefore, found no difficulty in obtaining six months' leave to visit France. There he realised that perhaps there might be some truth in the old adage to the effect that Jack has a sweetheart in every port.

## CHAPTER III

# Pleasure in France and Work in the West Indies

(1788-1793)

*Admirals all, for England's sake  
Honour be theirs, and fame ;  
And honour, so long as waves shall break,  
To Nelson's peerless name.*

HENRY NEWBOLT.

NELSON took the greatest possible interest in everything he saw in France: "Sterne's 'Sentimental Journey' is the best description I can give of our tour." He travelled in a chaise without springs, slept on a straw bed—"O what a transition from happy England!"—but had less fault to find with the scenery about Montreuil, which he describes as "the finest corn country that my eyes ever beheld, diversified with fine woods, sometimes for two miles together through noble forests. The roads mostly were planted with trees, which made as fine an avenue as to any gentleman's country seat." At St Omer he lodged with "a pleasant French family," and incidentally made the acquaintance of "two very agreeable young ladies, daughters, who honour us with their company pretty often. . . . Therefore I must learn French if 'tis only for the pleasure of talking to them, for they do not speak a word of English." Soon all thoughts of study and of the "very agreeable" maidens were banished from his impressionable mind by his

introduction to a Miss Andrews, the daughter of an English clergyman. The affair rapidly ripened into something more than friendship.

*Her faults he knew not, Love is always blind,  
But every charm resolved within his mind.*

Nelson's letters go far to prove the truth of Pope's couplet. Miss Andrews was, according to him, "the most accomplished woman my eyes ever beheld." Unfortunately marriage is necessarily based on that mundane and concrete thing, money. When the ardent young officer came to look into the financial aspect of the matter he found that his income did not exceed £180 a year. His lady-love's dowry was "1,000*l*. I understand." He therefore appealed to his uncle, William Suckling, to allow him £100 per annum until he could earn that sum for himself. Failing this source of supply, would his relative "exert" himself "to get me a guard-ship, or some employment in a public office where the attendance of the principal is not necessary. . . . ? In the India Service I understand (if it remains under the Directors) their marine force is to be under the command of a captain in the Royal Navy: that is a station I should like." He prays that his uncle and his family "may never know the pangs which at this instant tear my heart."

Cupid's shaft neither proved deadly nor barbed. On his return to England Nelson dismissed his love affair, and was soon "running at the ring of pleasure" in London. He visited Lord Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty, "who asked me if I wished to be employed, which I told him I did"; dined with Lord Hood, who made him feel quite at home, and told him "that the oftener I came the happier it would make him." In January 1784 he was at Bath, and wrote to his brother that he thought of paying a second visit to the Continent till autumn and then spending the winter with him at Burnham Thorpe. "I return to many charming women, *but no charming woman will return*

with me," is the plaint. "I want to be a proficient in the language, which is my only reason for returning. I hate their country and their manners," which hatred, it may be said, increased with the passing of the years. This pessimistic strain is doubtless due to Nelson's undesirable position as a half-pay officer, but in the middle of March his somewhat mercurial temperament underwent a change to "set fair" on his appointment to the *Boreas*, a frigate of 28 guns, under orders for the Leeward Islands. The passengers included Lady Hughes, wife of Rear-Admiral Sir Richard Hughes, Bart., the Commander-in-Chief, and her daughter, whom he very ungallantly described as "lumber." His brother, the Rev. William Nelson, accompanied him as chaplain of the *Boreas*, but returned on the last day of September 1784 owing to ill-health.

Before leaving Spithead Nelson had an alarming adventure. He was riding what he describes as a "blackguard horse" in company with a lady, when both animals bolted. In order to save his legs from being crushed in a narrow road blocked by a waggon the young gallant was obliged to throw himself, and he had the ill-luck to fall upon hard stones, which injured his back and one of his limbs. His fair companion was only saved from death by the presence of mind of a passer-by who pluckily seized the bridle of the terrified animal to which she was frantically clinging.

The voyage to Antigua was devoid of incident. It was monotonous, and Nelson hated nothing so much as monotony. Lady Hughes bored him, although it is only just to add that he does not appear to have let her know it. The lady herself was certainly impressed with the kindly way Nelson treated "the young gentlemen who had the happiness of being on his Quarter-Deck," to quote a letter written by her in 1806. "It may reasonably be supposed," she goes on, "that among the number of thirty, there must be timid as well as bold; the timid he never rebuked, but always

wished to show them he desired nothing of them that he would not instantly do himself: and I have known him say—"Well, sir, I am going a race to the mast-head, and I beg I may meet you there." No denial could be given to such a wish, and the poor fellow instantly began his march. His Lordship never took the least notice with what alacrity it was done, but when he met in the top, instantly began talking in the most cheerful manner, and saying how much a person was to be pitied that could fancy there was any danger, or even anything disagreeable, in the attempt. . . . In like manner he every day went to the schoolroom and saw them do their nautical business, and at twelve o'clock he was first upon the deck with his quadrant. No one there could be behindhand in his business when their Captain set them so good an example. One other circumstance I must mention which will close the subject, which was the day we landed at Barbadoes. We were to dine at the Governor's. Our dear Captain said, "You must permit me, Lady Hughes, to carry one of my aides-de-camp with me," and when he presented him to the Governor, he said, "Your Excellency must excuse me for bringing one of my midshipmen, as I make it a rule to introduce them to all the good company I can, they have few to look up to besides myself during the time they are at sea." This kindness and attention made the young people adore him; and even his wishes, could they have been known, would have been instantly complied with."

When Nelson made the acquaintance of Sir Richard Hughes he disliked him as much as he did her ladyship. Probably the officer's methods rather than the man aroused this feeling of antagonism. "The Admiral and all about him are great ninnies," he writes, and he soon showed in no vague way that he refused to support the Commander-in-chief's happy-go-lucky policy. Truth to tell, Nelson had no love of authority. He preferred to be a kind of attached free-lance, although he was a strict disciplinarian in all relations between



his junior officers and himself. "I begin to be very strict in my Ship," is an expression he used while in the *Boreas*. In particular he fell foul of Hughes in the matter of putting the Navigation Act into force. This law had been passed by the Rump Parliament in 1651, when the Dutch held the proud position of the world's maritime carriers. It was enacted that only English ships, commanded by an Englishman and manned by a crew three-fourths of whom were also of the same nationality, should be allowed to carry the products of Asia, Africa, and America to home ports. In a similar manner, European manufactures had to be brought in English vessels or those of the countries which produced the goods. In the latter case the duties were heavier. It was Protection pure and simple.

The Government of Charles II. and the Scottish Parliament passed similar Acts in later years, thereby fostering the trading companies which helped to lay the foundations of our colonial empire. Such measures were a constant "thorn in the flesh" to foreign statesmen. Several of the statutes were repealed in 1823, but the Navigation Act was not entirely abandoned by Great Britain until 1848, after an existence of nearly two hundred years.

Owing to their separation from the Motherland, the former British colonists of America were, technically, "foreigners," and should have been subject to restrictions in their commercial intercourse with the West Indies. "I, for one," Nelson confides to Locker, "am determined not to suffer the Yankees to come where my Ship is; for I am sure, if once the Americans are admitted to any kind of intercourse with these Islands, the views of the Loyalists in settling Nova Scotia are entirely done away. They will first become the Carriers, and next have possession of our Islands, are we ever again embroiled in a French war. The residents of these Islands are Americans by connexion and by interest, and are inimical to Great Britain.

They are as great rebels as ever were in America, had they the power to show it. . . . I am determined to suppress the admission of Foreigners all in my power."

"The Americans," Nelson tells us in his Autobiography, "when colonists, possessed almost all the trade from America to our West India Islands; and on the return of peace, they forgot, on this occasion, that they became foreigners, and of course had no right to trade in the British Colonies.

"Our governors and custom-house officers pretended that by the Navigation Act they had a right to trade; and all the West Indians wished what was so much for their interest. Having given governors, custom-house officers, and Americans, notice of what I would do, I seized many of their vessels, which brought all parties upon me; and I was persecuted from one island to another, so that I could not leave my ship." In this matter it may be said that Nelson found it necessary to keep himself "a close prisoner" to avoid being served with writs which had been issued against him by the owners of certain vessels which he had taken, and who assessed their damages at several thousands of pounds. "But conscious rectitude," he adds, "bore me through it; and I was supported, when the business came to be understood, from home; and I proved (and an Act of Parliament has since established it) that a captain of a man-of-war is in duty bound to support all the maritime laws, by his Admiralty commission alone, without becoming a custom-house officer."

The ardent captain also fell foul of Hughes in another matter. The commissioner of the dockyard at Antigua was Captain Moutray, a half-pay officer whom Hughes, going beyond his powers, made commodore. Nelson refused to recognise him as such. The case was investigated by the Admiralty at the instigation of both parties, with the result that Nelson was reprimanded for taking the law into his own hands. Professor Sir J. Knox Laughton, while admitting that "In both cases Nelson was right in his contention," is forced

to add that "The first duty of an officer is to obey orders, to submit his doubts to the Commander-in-chief, and in a becoming manner to remonstrate against any order he conceives to be improper; but for an officer to settle a moot-point himself, and to act in contravention of an order given under presumably adequate knowledge of the circumstances, is subversive of the very first principles of discipline. And these were not, it will be noticed, questions arising out of any sudden and unforeseen emergency, in providing for which Nelson was forced to depart from his instructions. Such emergencies do arise in the course of service, and the decision of the officer may be a fair test of his personal worth; but neither at St Kitts nor at Antigua was there anything calling for instant decision, or any question which might not have waited, pending a reference to the Commander-in-chief or to the Admiralty. And this was the meaning of the Admiralty minute on Nelson's conduct at Antigua, a most gentle admonition for what might have been punished as a grave offence."

It must not be inferred that there was any personal bitterness on Nelson's part regarding the Moutray affair. He conceived it to be a question of principle, of doing right and shunning wrong: "The character of an Officer is his greatest treasure: to lower that, is to wound him irreparably." He was certainly on excellent terms with the Commissioner's wife, for whom he cherished the most friendly feelings. Indeed, in one of his letters he calls her his "dear, sweet friend. . . . Her equal I never saw in any country, or in any situation." Let it be frankly admitted, however, that Nelson sometimes wore his heart on his sleeve, and readily betrayed a state of feeling approaching deep affection for any member of the gentler sex who showed by her ready sympathy that she possessed a kindly disposition. In the communication in which the above passage occurs he notes that several of his comrades had similar amorous tendencies. One officer has proposed and been refused, another is forestalled in

proposing to the lady of his choice by a more venturesome lover, a third is "attached to a lady at Nevis," the said lady being a relation of the future Mrs Nelson. He concludes with a reference to a niece of Governor Parry, who "goes to Nevis in the *Boreas*; they trust any young lady with me, being an old-fashioned fellow."

On the 12th May 1785 Nelson confides to his brother William that he has made the acquaintance of "a young Widow," and towards the end of the following month he tells the same correspondent, "between ourselves," that he is likely to become a "*Benedict*. . . . Do not tell." The lady of his choice was Mrs Nisbet, then twenty-seven years of age and the mother of a boy. We are fortunate in having copies of many of his letters to her, for there is a wealth of affection—scarcely love—and much sage philosophy in them. "My greatest wish is to be united to you," he writes on the 11th September 1785, "and the foundation of all conjugal happiness, real love and esteem, is, I trust, what you believe I possess in the strongest degree towards you. . . . We know that riches do not always insure happiness; and the world is convinced that I am superior to pecuniary considerations in my public and private life; as in both instances I might have been rich." "You are too good and indulgent;" he avers on another occasion, "I both know and feel it: but my whole life shall ever be devoted to make you completely happy, whatever whims may sometimes take me. We are none of us perfect, and myself probably much less so than you deserve." "Fortune, that is, money, is the only thing I regret the want of, and that only for the sake of my affectionate Fanny. But the Almighty, who brings us together, will, I doubt not, take ample care of us, and prosper all our undertakings. No dangers shall deter me from pursuing every honourable means of providing handsomely for you and yours. . . ."

The messages lack the passionate fire of Napoleon's notes to Josephine, and on occasion are apt to be rather

too business-like for love letters. The romance did not end like the fairy stories, they did not live "happily ever after," but there is no reason to doubt that Nelson cherished a fond affection for the young widow. "Her sense," he informs his brother, "polite manners, and to you I may say, beauty, you will much admire: and although at present we may not be a rich couple, yet I have not the least doubt but we shall be a happy pair:—the fault must be mine if we are not." Subsequent events proved the truth of the latter remark.

In due course Sir Richard Hughes was succeeded in the command of the Leeward Islands by Sir Richard Bickerton. Nelson complains towards the end of 1786 that "A total stop is put to our carrying on the Navigation Laws," thereby showing that the old problem had by no means been solved so far as he was concerned.

On the 12th March 1787 Nelson and Mrs Nisbet were married at Nevis. Prince William Henry, then captain of the *Pegasus* and under Nelson's command, gave away the bride. Three months later the newly-wedded captain was at Spithead, the almost unseaworthy condition of the *Boreas* making it impossible for her to stand another hurricane season in the West Indies.

Nelson was placed on half-pay, a state which he by no means liked. In May 1788 he had reason to believe that he would be employed again. "I have invariably laid down," he tells a friend, "and followed close, a plan of what ought to be uppermost in the breast of an Officer: that it is much better to serve an ungrateful Country, than to give up his own fame. Posterity will do him justice: a uniform conduct of honour and integrity seldom fails of bringing a man to the goal of Fame at last."

Nelson visited Plymouth, Bath, and London, and finally settled down at Burnham Thorpe. His letters reveal the keenness with which he desired to obtain employment. He applied to both Viscount Howe, First Lord of the Admiralty, and to Lord Hood, but all

his overtures came to nought. In September 1780 he tells his old friend Locker that "I am now commencing Farmer, not a very large one, you will conceive, but enough for amusement. Shoot I cannot, therefore I have not taken out a license; but notwithstanding the neglect I have met with, I am happy, and now I see the propriety of not having built my hopes on such sandy foundations as the friendships of the Great."

Not until January 1793 were his dearest wishes granted. "After clouds comes sunshine," he writes to his wife from London. "The Admiralty so smile upon me, that really I am as much surprised as when they frowned. Lord Chatham yesterday made many apologies for not having given me a Ship before this time, and said, that if I chose to take a Sixty-four to begin with, I should be appointed to one as soon as she was ready; and whenever it was in his power, I should be removed into a Seventy-four. Everything indicates War. . . ."

## CHAPTER IV

# The Beginning of the Great War

(1793-1794)

*"Duty is the great business of a sea officer"*

NELSON.

SO far back as 1753 Lord Chesterfield prophesied a revolution in France. "All the symptoms," he said, "which I have ever met with in history, previous to great changes and revolutions in government, now exist and daily increase in France." Warning rumbles heralded the storm, disregarded and thought of no account by some, full of grave portent to others. It burst in 1789.

At first William Pitt, First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer, steadily refused to believe that England was menaced by the Power which Fox had termed "the natural enemy of Great Britain." In January 1792 he assured Parliament that "unquestionably there never was a time in the history of this country when, from the situation of Europe, we might more reasonably expect fifteen years of peace than we may at the present moment." Either he was over anxious to persuade himself that things were as he would like them to be, or he was sadly mistaken. Pitt had by no means the pugnacious disposition of his father, the famous first Earl of Chatham. He thought that the fire would burn itself out, that it would be of short duration, whereas it steadily gained strength and eventually involved practically every country in Europe. Not until he was convinced that war was

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inevitable did the youngest Premier who ever handled the reins of a British government accept the French Revolution as of more than local consequence. Hitherto domestic and financial questions had occupied his attention and absorbed his energies. If France ignored the nation which he represented, if she refrained from poaching on British preserves or those of her allies, he was quite content to return the compliment. Then came the decree that the navigation of the river Scheldt should be thrown open. It had previously been guaranteed to the Dutch by Great Britain as well as by other Powers, including France. The execution of Louis XVI. followed, which led to Chauvelin, the French Ambassador, being given his passports. If Pitt had been slumbering he had wooed somnolence with one eye open since the annexation of Savoy. He was now fully awake, calm and self-reliant, for he recognised the inevitable. It came in a declaration of war by the French Convention against Holland and Great Britain on the 1st February 1793. Macaulay, writing from an essentially Whig point of view, states that Pitt's military administration "was that of a driveller," but to the impartial historian nothing is further from the truth. He abandoned his schemes of social reform to plunge whole-heartedly into the titanic struggle which was to cost him his life. That he made mistakes is obvious—what statesman has not?—but he fell in his country's cause as nobly as Nelson at Trafalgar and Moore at Coruña.

When Nelson joined the *Agamemnon* he was immensely pleased with her. He describes the vessel as "without exception, the finest 64 in the service, and has the character of sailing most remarkably well." She was a unit of the fleet under Lord Hood, her destination the Mediterranean. The captain was accompanied by his step-son, Josiah, whose first experience of life at sea cannot have been pleasant. Off the Nore the *Agamemnon* encountered a gale, with the result that Josiah was "a little sea-sick." However,



"he is a real good boy, and most affectionately loves me," as his mother was informed. Off Cadiz Nelson is able to report, "My Ship is remarkably healthy; myself and Josiah never better."

While part of the fleet was watering at Cadiz, Nelson dined on board the *Concepcion* (112), a huge Spanish sail-of-the-line. The experience afforded him food for thought as well as for physical sustenance. He relates the incident to his wife, criticises the four Spanish first-rates in commission at the port as "very fine Ships, but shockingly manned," and adds that if the crews of the six barges attached to the British vessels had boarded one of these great vessels they could have taken her: "The Dons may make fine Ships,—they cannot, however, make men." This summing-up of the *morale* of the Spanish Navy is particularly valuable. A dozen years later, when Napoleon was planning his wonderful combinations to elude the prowess of Nelson, the lack of skill displayed by the Spaniards was a constant source of annoyance both to the Emperor and his naval officers. Their bravery in action during the Trafalgar Campaign is not questioned; their happy-go-lucky code of discipline is on record in documentary evidence. A bull fight which Nelson saw sickened and disgusted him. "We had what is called a fine feast, for five horses were killed, and two men very much hurt: had they been killed, it would have been quite complete."

The royalists at Toulon had not only openly rebelled against the National Convention, but had requested the assistance of the British fleet, then blockading the harbour of the great southern arsenal, under Hood, who was shortly afterwards joined by Langara in command of a number of Spanish vessels. Nelson's *Agamemnon* was a fast sailer. He was therefore sent to Naples with despatches to the courts of Turin and Naples requesting 10,000 troops for the assault of Toulon. The ardent young officer, proud of the service which had been delegated to him, was a little too sanguine as to Hood's triumph, yet his cheery optimism is tinged with cynicism

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when he writes to his wife: "I believe the world is convinced that no conquests of importance can be made without us; and yet, as soon as we have accomplished the service we are ordered on, we are neglected. If Parliament does not grant something to this Fleet, our Jacks will grumble; for here there is no prize-money to soften their hardships: all we get is honour and salt beef. My poor fellows have not had a morsel of fresh meat or vegetables for near nineteen weeks; and in that time I have only had my foot twice on shore at Cadiz. We are absolutely getting sick from fatigue. No Fleet, I am certain, ever served their Country with greater zeal than this has done, from the Admiral to the lowest sailor."

At Naples Nelson was received by the King "in the handsomest manner," and a promise of troops was exacted without delay. He also made the acquaintance of Lady Hamilton, wife of the British Minister, but the romantic attachment between them did not begin until several years later. His Majesty was on the point of visiting the *Agamemnon* when the Captain received intelligence from the Prime Minister—Sir John Acton, an English baronet—that a French sail-of-the-line convoying three vessels had anchored under Sardinia. Nelson acknowledges to his brother, on the 27th September 1793, that "Fortune has not crowned my endeavours with success. The French have either got into Leghorn, or are housed in some port of Corsica. . . . I purpose staying three days in Port, when I shall get to Toulon, for I cannot bear the thought of being absent from the scene of action." His unsuccessful search for the enemy had precluded him from accompanying such Neapolitan troops as were ready to be sent to the scene of conflict. In addition a large French frigate had put into the neutral port of Leghorn, which gave him further anxiety. As her commander did not think it wise to attempt an issue with the *Agamemnon* Nelson left him to his own devices. He anchored off Toulon, on the 5th October, to find

Lord Hood "very much pleased" with him. This must have been particularly gratifying after so luckless a voyage, but what he most desired was action.

Within a few days of his arrival he received sealed orders from the Admiral directing him to join Commodore Linzee off Cagliari, the capital of Sardinia. His longing to get at the enemy was to be satisfied in an unexpected manner. When he was nearing the island just before dawn on the morning of the 22nd October, five strange sail made their appearance. Later they resolved themselves into four of the enemy's frigates and a brig. After an engagement which lasted nearly four hours and was ably contested on both sides, the action terminated in the French *Melpomène* being reduced to "a shattered condition," and the *Agamemnon* having her "top-mast shot to pieces, main-mast, mizen-mast, and fore-yard badly wounded"—the last expression is typically Nelsonian. The Frenchmen did not attempt to renew the fight; Nelson was prevented from doing so because "The *Agamemnon* was so cut to pieces, as to be unable to haul the wind towards them." The enemy's squadron made for Corsica, Nelson for Cagliari, according to orders, with one man killed and six wounded.

When Nelson joined hands with Linzee he found that the immediate business in hand was to endeavour to bring the Bey of Tunis to reason, in other words, to the British side. The Bey was an exceedingly crafty individual who, believing that the best time for making hay is when the sun shines, had sided with the French because he saw an immediate financial return. Another object was to secure a convoy which had put in at Tunis under a sail-of-the-line, the *Duquesne* (84) and four frigates, the force with which Nelson had already dealt. As the Bey had purchased the cargoes of the merchantmen at a handsome profit, he was not disposed to change his policy. Nelson hated pacific overtures; he was all for contest on the open sea. "Thank God," he is able to write to William Sucklin, his uncle, on

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the 5th December 1793, "Lord Hood, whom Linzee sent to for orders how to act, after having negotiated, ordered me from under his command, and to command a Squadron of Frigates off Corsica and the Coast of Italy, to protect our trade, and that of our new Ally, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and to prevent any Ship or Vessel, of whatever Nation, from going into the port of Genoa. I consider this command as a very high compliment,—there being five older Captains in the Fleet. . . ."

"Corsica, December 8th:—I have been in sight of the French Squadron all day, at anchor; they cannot be induced to come out, notwithstanding their great superiority. . . ."

On the 19th of the same month Lord Hood vacated Toulon.<sup>1</sup> The troops of the National Convention, aided by the consummate skill of Napoleon Bonaparte, a young officer then beginning his amazing career, had proved too powerful for the British, Spanish, Piedmontese and Neapolitan forces. The British fleet carried away no fewer than 14,000 fugitives from the doomed city, which for hours afterwards was given up to pillage. "Everything which domestic Wars produce usually, is multiplied at Toulon," Nelson writes to his wife. "Fathers are here [*i.e.* Leghorn] without their families, families without their fathers. In short, all is horror. . . . Lord Hood put himself at the head of the flying troops, and the admiration of every one; but the torrent was too strong. Many of our posts were carried without resistance; at others, which the English occupied, every one perished. I cannot write all: my mind is deeply impressed with grief. Each teller makes the scene more horrible. Lord Hood showed himself the same collected good Officer which he always was." The siege of Toulon was a qualified success. The place was lost, but a dozen French ships and the naval stores were set on fire, and four sail-of-

<sup>1</sup> More detailed particulars of this thrilling siege will be found in the author's companion volume, "The Story of Napoleon," pp. 60-61.

the-line, three frigates, and several smaller vessels were secured as prizes. To cripple the French navy was the most desired of all objects.

Meanwhile Nelson's division was blockading Corsica, which had passed from the Republic of Genoa into the hands of the French in 1768, to the disgust of the patriotic party headed by Pascal Paoli. It was arranged that Hood should assist the latter to rid the island of the hated "tyrants," and that in due course it should be ceded to Great Britain. In the preliminary negotiations Nelson was represented by Lieutenant George Andrews, brother of the young lady to whom Nelson had become attached during his visit to France in 1783;<sup>1</sup> the final arrangements were made by a commission of which the gallant Sir John Moore was a member. Hood joined Nelson on the 27th January 1794, and on the following day the fleet encountered "the hardest gale almost ever remembered here." The *Agamemnon* "lost every sail in her," her consorts were dispersed "over the face of the waters." This delayed the landing of the troops Hood had brought with him, but Nelson had already made a preliminary skirmish on his own account near San Fiorenzo, the first object of the admiral's attack. He landed 120 soldiers and seamen, emptied a flour storehouse, ruined a water-mill, and returned without the loss of a man, notwithstanding the efforts of the French gunboats to annihilate the little force. Similar expeditions were undertaken at the beginning of February, when four polaccas, loaded with wine for the enemy's fleet, were burned, four other vessels set on fire, a similar number captured, and about 1,000 tuns of wine demolished.

On the 7th of the same month the inhabitants of Rogliani showed National colours, and the Tree of Liberty—the emblem of the French Revolution—was planted. Nelson struck a flag flying on the old castle with his own hand, and ordered the tree to be cut down. More craft and wine were destroyed. Paoli was highly

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, page 43.

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gratified by this performance, carried out in the true Nelson spirit, and shortly afterwards the Captain tells his wife with conscious pride, "I have had the pleasure to fulfil the service I had been employed upon, since leaving Tunis, neither allowing provisions nor troops to get into Corsica,"—which he describes later as "a wonderfully fine Island"—"nor the Frigates to come out."

Hood now took over the command at San Fiorenzo and sent Nelson to blockade Bastia. The latter calculated that "it would require 1000 troops, besides seamen, Corsicans, etc., to make any successful attempt" against the place. Lieutenant-General David Dundas, the commander of the military forces, refused his aid unless considerable reinforcements came to hand, although he had at his disposal over 1700 regulars and artillerymen. Hood, relying on Nelson's statements to a certain extent, endeavoured to persuade Dundas that the task was by no means so difficult as he imagined, but the military authority positively refused to listen to the project. The General entered into the arrangements for the capture of San Fiorenzo with more goodwill, for in his opinion it was a less formidable undertaking. Without in any way disparaging the exertions of the troops it must be admitted that the gallant conduct of the sailors, who dragged heavy guns up the heights in order to place them in a position to cannonade the tower of Mortello, which commanded the situation, contributed largely to the success of the operation. Dundas and Linzee attacked this formidable fortification from the bay with a sail-of-the-line and a frigate on the 8th February with ill success. Its defenders hurled hot shot at the vessels with such precision that they were obliged to move to a less dangerous position. The tower was bombarded from the steepes for two days before its garrison surrendered. Meanwhile Lieutenant-Colonel John Moore had carried the batteries of Fornelli, which led directly to the fall of San Fiorenzo on the 17th instant. The French retreated to Bastia.

on the opposite side of the promontory, where Nelson was exerting himself to the utmost. The British troops marched to within three miles of the town, as noted below, and were then ordered to return to San Fiorenzo.

On the 23rd February the *Agamemnon* and two frigates dislodged the French from a battery of six guns; "they to a man quitted the works." For Lord Hood's encouragement he sent him word that shot and shells had been hurled at the vessels "without doing us any damage of consequence: our guns were so exceedingly well pointed, that not one shot was fired in vain. . . . Indeed, my Lord, I wish the troops were here: Bastia, I am sure, in its present state, would soon fall."

In describing "our little brush" to his wife, he says it "happened at the moment when part of our Army made their appearance on the hills over Bastia, they having marched over land from St Fiorenzo, which is only twelve miles distant. The General sent an express to Lord Hood at Fiorenzo to tell him of it. What a noble sight it must have been! indeed, on board it was the grandest thing I ever saw. If I had carried with me five hundred troops, to a certainty I should have stormed the Town, and I believe it might have been carried. . . . You cannot think how pleased Lord Hood has been with my attack on Sunday last, or rather my repelling of an attack which the Enemy made on me."

Nelson's ardent temperament, his longing to be up and doing, made him think bitter things of Dundas. He confides to his Journal on the 3rd March 1794 that it is his firm opinion that if the *Agamemnon* and the attendant frigates could batter down the sea-wall and then land 500 troops they would "to a certainty carry the place." "God knows what it all means," he writes to his wife with reference to the general's retreat. "Lord Hood is gone to St Fiorenzo to the Army, to get them forward again. . . . My seamen are now what British seamen ought to be, to you I may say it,

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almost invincible : they really mind shot no more than peas."

The delay was simply playing into the hands of the enemy, who occupied the time in adding to the defences of the town. One can imagine with what glee Nelson scribbled in his Journal, under date of the 11th March, "*Romney* joined me from Lord Hood: brought me letters to say that General Dundas was going Home, and that he hoped and trusted the troops would once more move over the Hill." The crew of the *Agamemnon* suffered no little privation. "We are absolutely without water, provisions, or stores of any kind, not a piece of canvas, rope, twine, or a nail in the Ship; but we cheerfully submit to it all, if it but turns out for the advantage and credit of our Country."

Dundas was succeeded by General Abraham D'Aubant, an appointment which gave the Captain of the *Agamemnon* no satisfaction, for he also thought it improper to attack Bastia. Not to carry to a finish a project already begun was considered by Nelson "a National disgrace." Hood determined to act contrary to the opinions of his military colleague. "I am to command the Seamen landed from the Fleet," Nelson tells his brother. "I feel for the honour of my Country, and had rather be beat than not make the attack. If we do not try we never can be successful. I own I have no fears for the final issue: it will be conquest, certain we will deserve it." "When was a place ever yet taken without an attempt?" he asks Sir William Hamilton. "We must endeavour to deserve success; it is certainly not in our power to command it. . . . My dear Sir, when was before the time that 2,000 British troops, as good as ever marched, were not thought equal to attack 800 French troops, allowing them to be in strong works? What would the immortal Wolfe have done? as he did, beat the Enemy, if he perished in the attempt. Our Irregulars are surely as good as the Enemy's; and in numbers we far exceed them. I truly feel sorrow, but I have hope and confidence that all will end well." Again,



"We are but few, but of the right sort: our General at San Fiorenzo not giving us one of the five Regiments he has there lying idle."

On the 4th April 1794 a definite start was made. Some 1400 troops and sailors, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Villettes and Nelson respectively, landed at the tower of Miomo, some three miles to the north of the town. "At noon the Troops encamped about 2,500 yards from the citadel of Bastia, near a high rock." The night was employed in felling trees for the purpose of constructing an abattis, a temporary defence formed by placing trees with their boughs sharpened to a point in such a position as to obstruct the enemy and at the same time afford a certain amount of cover for the riflemen. The getting up of the guns and ammunition "was performed with an activity and zeal seldom exceeded." The French began firing on the night of the 9th and kept it up until daylight without inflicting injury on a single man, although the tents were considerably damaged. After sending a flag of truce to no effect, Hood began the siege in earnest on the 11th. On that day the frigate *Proselyte* was set on fire by the enemy's red-hot shot, and as her captain could not get her off the shore, he set his ship on fire in several places and burnt her to the water's edge so that she might not fall into the hands of the hated Frenchmen.

"Only recollect that a brave man dies but once, a coward all his life long," Nelson writes to his wife at the beginning of May, when fighting was of daily occurrence and many a brave man fell on either side. His only fear was that D'Aubant might alter his mind and advance with his troops "when Bastia is about to surrender, and deprive us of part of our glory." This is exactly what happened. On the 19th May the troops from San Fiorenzo were seen marching over the hills. Three days later, as the result of negotiations begun by the enemy, the French colours were struck and the Union Jack hoisted, and on the 24th "the most glorious sight that an Englishman can experience,

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and which, I believe, none but an Englishman could bring about, was exhibited ;—4,500 men laying down their arms to less than 1,000 British soldiers, who were serving as Marines." Nelson gives the number of British killed at 19, wounded 87, and of the enemy 203 killed, wounded 540, "most of whom are dead." He himself received "a sharp cut in the back." Not until the end of January 1795 did he confess to his wife that he had information given to him "of the enormous number of Troops we had to oppose us ; but my own honour, Lord Hood's honour, and the honour of our Country, must have all been sacrificed, had I mentioned what I knew ; therefore, you will believe, what must have been my feelings during the whole Siege, when I had often proposals made to me by men, now rewarded, to write to Lord Hood to raise the Siege."

Calvi, in the north-west of Corsica, was next attacked. "Dragging cannon up steep mountains, and carrying shot and shells, has been our constant employment" ; "I am very busy, yet own I am in all my glory : except with you, [Mrs Nelson] I would not be any where but where I am, for the world" ; "Hallowell<sup>1</sup> and myself take, each one, twenty-four hours of duty at the advanced battery," are extracts from some of Nelson's letters and despatches at this period. On the 12th July 1794 he modestly confesses to Hood that "I got a little hurt this morning : not much, as you may judge by my writing," but in his Journal he notes, "at seven o'clock, I was much bruised in the face and eyes by sand from the works struck by shot." The "little hurt" proved far otherwise, and Nelson subsequently became permanently blind in the right eye. At the moment he attached little or no importance to the injury : "Hallowell and myself are both well, except my being half blinded by these fellows, who have given me a smart slap in the face, for which I am their *debtor*, but hope not to be so long" ; "My right eye is cut

<sup>1</sup> Captain Benjamin Hallowell (1760-1834). He afterwards assumed the name of Carew, and became a Vice-Admiral in 1810.

entirely down; but the Surgeons flatter me I shall not entirely lose my sight of that eye. At present I can distinguish light from dark, but no object: it confined me one day, when, thank God, I was enabled to attend to my duty. I feel the want of it; but, such is the chance of War, it was within a hair's breadth of taking off my head." To Mrs Nelson he tones down the news considerably: "Except a very slight scratch towards my right eye, I have received no hurt whatever: so you see I am not the worse for Campaigning: but I cannot say I have any wish to go on with it. This day [4th August 1794] I have been four months landed, except a few days when we were after the French Fleet, and I feel almost qualified to pass my examination as a besieging General."

Nelson not unnaturally felt himself slighted when his name did not appear in the list of wounded. However, he consoled himself by saying, "Never mind, I'll have a *Gazette* of my own."

As the result of negotiations between the enemy and General Stuart, the commander of the 1500 soldiers who had taken part in the siege, the French garrison marched out with the honours of war on the 10th August, a proceeding not at all in keeping with Nelson's ideas. However, it was not for him to decide, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he had materially assisted in the conquest of Corsica. He was specially delighted with the thought that in future the enemy's navy would be deprived of the pine, tar, pitch, and hemp which the island had formerly sent to Toulon.

Nelson now looked forward to reaching the quiet waters of Spithead before the end of the year. In this he was disappointed. Hood returned to Toulon, where French naval preparations were going on apace, and Nelson was sent with the *Agamemnon* to Leghorn in order that his ship might refit and his men have a little rest after their arduous exertions in Corsica. On his own showing, he was "the best in health, but every other Officer is scarcely able to crawl." When ready

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for further service Nelson joined the admiral off Toulon, from whence he proceeded to Genoa "to keep peace and harmony" with that Republic by enforcing its neutrality. This mission was not of long duration, and on the last day of September 1794 he was directed to proceed off Gourjean and place himself under the orders of Vice-Admiral Hotham, Hood's successor as Commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean.

At this stage of our story it may not be unfitting to study the accompanying table,<sup>1</sup> which reveals at a glance the active list of ships, exclusive of harbour and stationary vessels, troop and storeships, ships building, etc., in the British Navy, at the beginning of the Great War and in 1805:

Year.	Sail-of-the-line.	Total of Vessels.	Total tonnage.	Total Naval Supplies granted.	Seamen and Marines employed
1793	113	304	295,409	£4,003,984	45,000
1805	116	534	407,814	£15,035,630	120,000

When we come to compare the Navy of Nelson's day with that of our own, the result is astounding. The estimates for 1910-11 amount to £40,603,700. Of this sum, £13,279,880 is for ships either under construction or about to be laid down. There are 95 battleships and first-class cruisers afloat or building, and there is a total strength of 710 vessels, including torpedo gunboats, destroyers, torpedo boats, and submarines.<sup>2</sup> The entire *personnel*, exclusive of the reserves, numbers 181,000.

The accompanying illustration gives an exact idea of the enormous difference in size between the *Victory* and the *Hercules*. The former, launched in 1765, has a gross tonnage of 2,164; the latter—at the time of writing, the largest British battleship afloat—has a displacement of 20,250 tons, over nine times that of the *Victory*. Nelson's flagship is still afloat, but who can tell when the *Hercules* will be obsolete? Progress demands many and costly victims.

<sup>1</sup> "The Royal Navy," by Wm. Laird Clowes, vol. iv., p. 153, vol. v., pp. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> "The Navy League Annual, 1910-11," p. 226.

## CHAPTER V

### "I wish to be an Admiral"

(1795-96)

"A brave man runs no more risk than a coward"

NELSON.

THE French fleet at Toulon mustered fifteen ships; Hotham had fourteen at his disposal, including one Neapolitan sail-of-the-line. On the 8th March 1795 it was known that the enemy was at sea with the object of retaking Corsica, but it was not until the morning of the 18th, that the Admiral flew the signal for a general chase. While this was proceeding the *Ça-Ira* (84) collided with the *Victorie*, which precluded her from keeping up with her consorts. Seizing his opportunity, the captain of the British frigate *Inconstant* (36) pounced down upon the huge battleship and immediately brought her to action. A French frigate, the *Vestale*, then went to the assistance of the *Ça-Ira*, and took her in tow. Considerable damage had been done on board the *Inconstant* owing to the double fire to which she was subjected. Nelson, keenly alert to the slightest advantage, got abreast of the two Frenchmen, and continued to wage a gallant fight for nearly two hours until called off by Hotham because of the near approach of several of the enemy's ships. The action was thereby rendered indecisive. Nelson describes the *Ça-Ira* as "absolutely large enough to take *Agamemnon* in her hold. I never saw such a ship before."

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During the night the *Sans Culottes* (120) separated from her consorts, and the *Censeur* (74), with the damaged *Ça-Ira* in tow, was also unable to keep up with the remainder of the French fleet. This enabled the *Bedford* (74) and the *Captain* (74) to attempt to capture them on the following morning. The British ships, as they bore down on the enemy, were received by a tremendous fire, which they could not return. For nearly an hour and a half the fight was sustained until the *Captain* was little more than a floating wreck, and the distressed state of the *Bedford* made her recall imperative. Eventually the *Ça-Ira* and the *Censeur* surrendered to other vessels of the fleet. "On the 14th," Nelson relates with reference to the *Agamemnon*, "although one of the Van-ships, and in close Action on one side and distant Action on the other for upwards of three hours, yet our neighbours suffered most exceedingly, whilst we comparatively suffered nothing. We had only six men slightly wounded. Our sails were ribbons, and all our ropes were ends. Had our good Admiral have followed the blow, we should probably have done more, but the risk was thought too great." His ambition is aflame when he considers the possibilities of the day. "In short, I wish to be an Admiral, and in the command of the English Fleet; I should very soon either do much, or be ruined. My disposition cannot bear tame and slow measures. . . . At one period I am 'the dear Nelson,' 'the amiable Nelson,' 'the fiery Nelson': however nonsensical these expressions are, they are better than censure, and we are all subject and open to flattery."

Several weeks were spent in refitting, a necessary process too slowly carried out. Meanwhile six French vessels slipped out of Brest harbour and made their way to Toulon. Then there was delay in sending reinforcements not at all to Nelson's liking. He desires "a complete victory," and his correspondence betrays his anxiety for the appearance of Hood, "the best Officer, take him altogether, that England has to

boast of." His absence was "a great national loss;" Hotham's continued appearance, although he did not definitely say so, a calamity.

On the 6th June 1795 Nelson was appointed a Colonel of Marines, the welcome intelligence being conveyed to him by his father. This meant an increase of income not to be despised, as well as "an appointment certainly most flattering to me, as it marks to the world an approbation of my conduct."

Nelson, with the *Agamemnon* and a small squadron of frigates, was now sent "to co-operate with the Austrian General de Vins, in driving the French out of the Riviera of Genoa," and "to put an actual stop to all trade between Genoa, France, and the places occupied by the armies of France," the invasion of Italy then being an object much to be desired by the Republicans. On the 6th of July he sighted a French fleet of seventeen sail and six frigates, an overpowering force it would have been madness to attack had the opportunity been given to him. His little squadron was chased to San Fiorenzo, where Hotham was stationed but unable to get out owing to contrary winds. It was not until the 18th that the enemy was again seen. There was a general chase and a partial action: "Hotham has no head for enterprise, perfectly satisfied that each month passes without any losses on our side," is Nelson's criticism.

He still endeavoured to be more or less of a free-lance. "I am acting, not only without the orders of my Commander-in-chief," he tells his wife, "but in some measure contrary to them. However, I have not only the support of his Majesty's Ministers, both at Turin and Genoa, but a consciousness that I am doing what is right and proper for the service of our King and Country. Political courage in an Officer is as highly necessary as military courage." His position was difficult in the extreme, for while Genoa posed as a neutral the French did very much as they pleased, and the Austrian Army, subsidised by England, was

“slow beyond all description.” He found it impossible to patrol the coast as he would have done had he been able to procure sufficient cruisers and transports. However, he managed to secure a convoy of provisions and ammunition, various attacks were made, and for more than a year his service was one of continual worry and dissatisfaction.

With the resignation of Hotham and the coming of Sir John Jervis in November 1795 the naval policy in the Mediterranean underwent a change. The latter officer believed in watching an enemy's port at a convenient distance so as to render pursuit easy if necessary. With the exception of two or three squadrons on special service the fleet therefore took up its station off Toulon.

The victory of the French at the battle of Loano, on the 24th November 1795, was followed by their occupation of the Riviera of Genoa as a matter of course, the Austrians retreating into Piedmont. A certain amount of blame was laid on Nelson, who, as already noted, was in the neighbourhood of Genoa in order to see that the pretended neutrality was observed. Rumour had it that he and his officers had connived at the landing of supplies for the French army. This drew from him an indignant letter to Lord Grenville. It was certain that Genoa was a hot-bed of sedition and French partisanship. An Austrian commissary had been robbed, and Voltri temporarily captured; it was said that an insurrection of the peasantry was imminent and that men were publicly enlisted for service in the French army. The recruits were to embark in French ships lying in the port of Genoa and in coasters at Borghetto and to proceed to a landing-place near Voltri. Nelson, far from sympathising with the malcontents, prevented the sailing of the expedition by leaving Vado Bay and proceeding to the scene of the trouble. He placed the *Agamemnon* across the harbour-mouth and allowed none of the enemy's vessels to leave.

It is a mournful letter which he pens to Sir Gilbert



Elliot, Viceroy of Corsica, on the 4th December 1795 "My campaign is closed," he begins, "by the defeat of the Austrian Army, and the consequent loss of Vado and every place in the Riviera of Genoa, and I am on my way to refit poor *Agamemnon* and her miserable Ship's company at Leghorn. We are, indeed, Sir, worn out; except six days I have never been one hour off the station." The despatch is too lengthy to quote in full, but it is significant that he adds, "My being at Genoa, although contrary to my inclination, has been the means of saving from 8000 to 10,000 men, and amongst others, General de Vins himself, who escaped by the road, which, but for me, the Enemy would have occupied. I must, my dear Sir, regret not having more force."

Nelson, who now made the acquaintance of Jervis, early discerned that his senior officer was a man more after his own heart than either Hotham or Sir Hyde Parker, who had held the command during the interim. He was offered either a 90-gun or a 74-gun ship, but preferred to keep to the well-tried *Agamemnon*, for whose crew he cherished a fond affection. He was confident that in the succeeding Spring the victorious French would "make a great exertion to get into Italy." This they did, but by land and not by sea as Nelson anticipated. After refitting Nelson was still kept on the lookout, descents on Italy being thought not improbable, but in February 1796 he was off Toulon for a short time to spy on the doings of the French fleet. His health was by no means good: "I am grown old and battered to pieces, and require some repairs. However, on the whole, I have stood the fag better than could be expected." In the following month Nelson became a Commodore, hoisting his distinguishing pennant on the *Captain* (74) a little later, the condition of the ship which had served him so long and so well being such that she could no longer be patched up to withstand the gales without being overhauled in England.

The war was going from bad to worse so far as the

allies were concerned. The armies of the King of Sardinia and Piedmont and of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire acted in separate bodies, whereas they would have been superior to the enemy had they concentrated. The battle of Montenotte, fought on the 12th April 1796, took the Austrians completely by surprise, and enabled Napoleon to boast that his "title of nobility" dated from this great victory. Millesimo, Dego, Mondovi, and Cherasco fell, France and Sardinia made peace, followed by an armistice between Naples and the Republic which preluded a cessation of hostilities in the following October.

Although Nelson was gradually rising in the service he was by no means a wealthy man. "If we have a Spanish war," he confides to his brother on the 20th June 1796, "I shall yet hope to make something this war. At present, I believe I am worse than when I set out—I mean in point of riches, for if credit and honour in the service are desirable, I have my full share. Opportunities have been frequently offered me, and I have never lost one of distinguishing myself, not only as a gallant man, but as having a head; for, of the numerous plans I have laid, not one has failed, nor of opinions given, has one been in the event wrong. It is this latter which has perhaps established my character more than the others; and I hope to return in as good health as I set out with."

The French having taken possession of Leghorn, Nelson was ordered to blockade that important port. At the same time he received intelligence from Sir Gilbert Elliot that there was a likelihood of the enemy making an attempt on the fortress of Porto Ferrajo in order that Elba might be used as a stepping-stone to Corsica. The place was secured by the British without resort to the sword, the good understanding between the military and naval forces being in marked contrast to Nelson's previous experience at Bastia, "a farther proof of what may be effected by the hearty co-operation of the two services." He was soon back

at his former station, carrying out his work efficiently and to Jervis's complete satisfaction. The Commodore's letter to his wife, dated the 2nd August 1796, reflects his high spirits and relates two anecdotes of more than ordinary interest. After telling Mrs Nelson that "Wherever there is anything to be done, there Providence is sure to direct my steps. Credit must be given me in spite of envy," he proceeds as follows :

"Even the French respect me: their Minister at Genoa, in answering a Note of mine, when returning some wearing apparel that had been taken, said, 'Your Nation, Sir, and mine, are made to show examples of generosity, as well as of valour, to all the people of the earth.' . . .

"I will also relate another anecdote, all vanity to myself, but you will partake of it: A person sent me a letter, and directed as follows, 'Horatio Nelson, Genoa.' On being asked how he could direct in such a manner, his answer, in a large party, was 'Sir, there is but one Horatio Nelson in the world.' The letter certainly came immediately. At Genoa, where I have stopped all their trade, I am beloved and respected, both by the Senate and lower Order. If any man is fearful of his Vessel being stopped, he comes and asks me; if I give him a Paper, or say, 'All is right,' he is contented. I am known throughout Italy; not a Kingdom, or State, where my name will be forgotten. This is my Gazette."

Towards the end of September Jervis was directed by the Home Authorities to assist the Viceroy in the evacuation of Corsica, "and with the fleet to retreat down the Mediterranean." This was deemed advisable by the knowledge that war was likely to be declared against Great Britain by Spain, that Power having entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with the ever victorious French Republic on the 12th September 1796. Nelson, who had but recently assisted at the capture of the little island of Capraja, which he hoped with some reason would "give additional security

to the Kingdom of Corsica,” was not pleased when duty called him to undertake the evacuation of the country so inseparably associated with Napoleon. “God knows what turn the minds of the Corsicans may take when the measure comes to be known,” he tells Jervis. Leaving the Mediterranean was a sore trial, “a measure which I cannot approve. They at home do not know what this Fleet is capable of performing; anything, and everything. Much as I shall rejoice to see England”—he was writing to his wife—“I lament our present orders in sackcloth and ashes, so dishonourable to the dignity of England, whose Fleets are equal to meet the World in arms; and of all the Fleets I ever saw, I never beheld one in point of officers and men equal to Sir John Jervis’s, who is a Commander-in-chief able to lead them to glory.”

The Commodore was next instructed to embark the garrison of Porto Ferrajo preparatory to the abandonment of Elba. Certain of the troops were then to be landed at Gibraltar and the remainder at Lisbon: “The object of our Fleet in future is the defence of Portugal, and keeping in the Mediterranean the Combined Fleets,” namely those of Spain and France. While on his way to carry out his important mission Nelson was to meet with a surprising adventure.

## CHAPTER VI

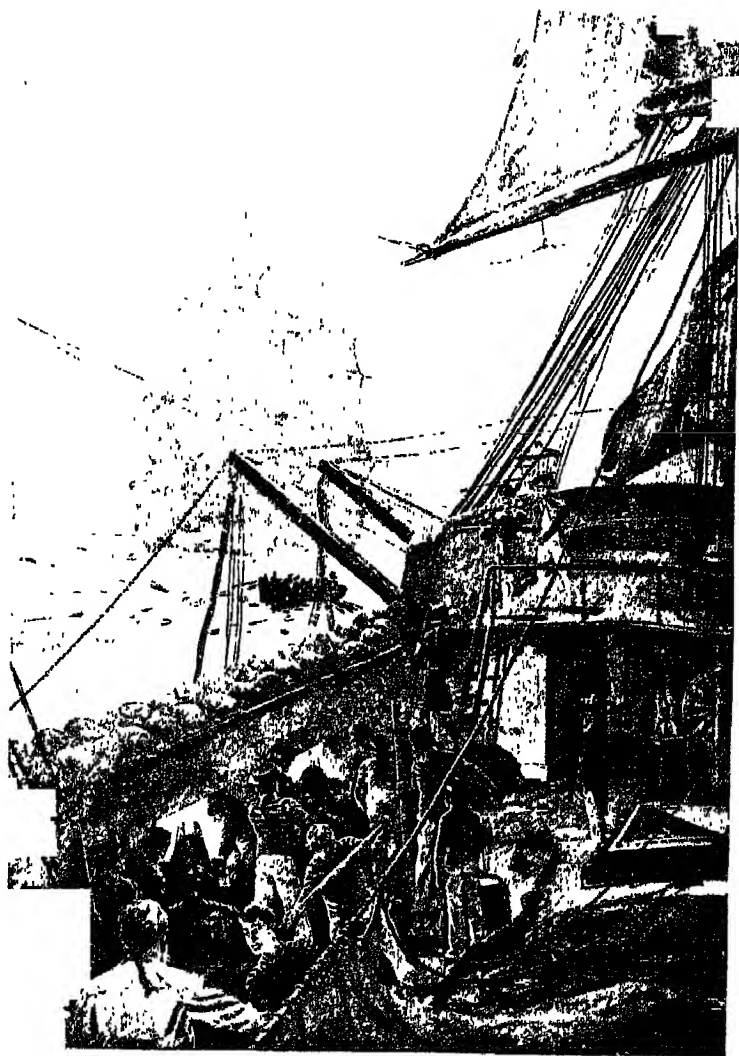
# Nelson's First Great Fight : The Battle of Cape St Vincent

(1797)

*"To have had any share in it is honour enough for one man's life, but to have been foremost on such a day could fall to your share alone"*

SIR GILBERT ELLIOT.

SIR JOHN JERVIS had concentrated his fleet in Gibraltar Bay. Nelson was making his way from thence to Elba in the *Minerve*, accompanied by the *Blanche*, both 32-gun frigates. All went well until late in the evening of the 19th December 1796, when they fell in with two Spanish frigates named the *Santa Sabina* (40) and the *Ceres* (40) off Cartagena. The Commodore at once instructed Captain Cockburn to bring the *Minerve* to close action with the former. The struggle which ensued lasted for nearly three hours. The lengthy resistance of the enemy is proof that there were still gallant officers in the naval service of what was once the mightiest Sea Power in the world, now long since fallen from her high estate. Captain Don Jacobo Stuart fought his ship with praiseworthy calm and daring. Not until 164 of the 286 men who comprised the crew of the *Santa Sabina* had been killed or wounded did the Don strike his colours. The vessel had then lost both main and fore-masts, and the deck must have resembled a shambles. The *Blanche* had also behaved well, although the action was trifling compared with the determined encounter between the



" I'll not lose Hardy! "

H. C. Seppings Wright



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other vessels. The approach of three additional ships prevented the captain of the *Blanche* from following up his advantage and capturing the *Ceres*, which had hauled down her colours and sustained considerable damage to her sails and rigging.

Nelson's prize was put in charge of Lieutenants Culverhouse and Hardy and taken in tow by the *Minerve*. They had not proceeded far before a third Spanish frigate came up and engaged the *Minerve*, necessitating the casting-off of the *Santa Sabina*, thereby leaving the two young, but able, junior officers to their own resources. The encounter lasted a little over half-an-hour, when the frigate having had enough of Nelson's pommelling hauled off. The vessels from which Captain D'Arcy Preston of the *Blanche* had escaped were now approaching, their commanders having been attracted by the sound of distant firing. Dawn revealed them to Nelson as two sail-of-the-line and a frigate. By hoisting English colours above the Spanish flag on the prize the enemy's Admiral was attracted to her, a ruse which enabled the *Minerve* and the *Blanche* to escape, for it would have been foolish for Nelson to run the risk of sacrificing them because of the prize crew. Indeed, the situation was so perilous that Nelson afterwards wrote to Sir Gilbert Elliot, "We very narrowly escaped visiting a Spanish prison." Neither before nor since have British Tars behaved in finer fashion. They sailed the *Santa Sabina* until she was practically a hulk, when she was recaptured.

"The merits of every officer and man in the *Minerve* and her Prize," Nelson reports to Jervis, "were eminently conspicuous through the whole of this arduous day." He likewise said the kindest things of his antagonist: "My late prisoner, a descendant from the Duke of Berwick, son of James II., was my brave opponent; for which I have returned him his sword, and sent him in a Flag of truce to Spain . . . he was reputed the best Officer in Spain, and his men were worthy of such a Commander; he was the only surviving Officer." He reserved more picturesque details for his brother.



"When I hailed the Don," he relates, "and told him, 'This is an English Frigate,' and demanded his surrender or I would fire into him, his answer was noble, and such as became the illustrious family from which he is descended—'This is a Spanish Frigate, and you may begin as soon as you please.' I have no idea of a closer or sharper battle: the force to a gun the same, and nearly the same number of men; we having two hundred and fifty. I asked him several times to surrender during the Action, but his answer was—'No, Sir; not whilst I have the means of fighting left.' When only himself of all the Officers were left alive, he hailed, and said he could fight no more, and begged I would stop firing." Culverhouse and Hardy, after having been conveyed to Carthage, were subsequently exchanged for the unlucky but brave Don, and returned to the *Minerve*.

Nelson duly anchored at Porto Ferrajo, and met with a lack of co-operation on the part of the military authority similar to some of his previous experiences. Lieutenant-General de Burgh, in command of the troops, declined to evacuate the town. Nelson, having no other alternative, removed the naval stores, left a number of sloops and gun-boats for use in emergency, and sailed for Gibraltar, which he reached on the 9th February 1797, having looked into the enemy's ports of Toulon and Cartagena on the way. Two days later the Commodore again set out in his endeavour to join Jervis, and was chased by two Spanish ships. It was then that a memorable incident occurred in the lives of both Nelson and Hardy, names inseparably associated. A man fell overboard, and Hardy and a crew in the jolly-boat hastened to the rescue. The current was strong, the poor fellow sank, and the boat rapidly drifted in the direction of one of the oncoming vessels, so that Hardy stood a very good chance of again falling into the hands of the enemy. "I'll not lose Hardy; back the mizen topsail," shouted Nelson without a moment's hesitation. This was done, and

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the lieutenant and his sailors were rescued. The Spaniards were completely put off their guard. Led to imagine by the peculiar manœuvre of the *Minerve* that other British ships had been sighted, they gave up the chase. No further exciting incidents occurred as the doughty frigate ploughed the blue waters of the Mediterranean, although the Spanish fleet was passed at night. On the 13th Nelson joined Jervis, off Cape St Vincent, and was able to assure him that a battle appeared imminent. "Every heart warmed to see so brave and fortunate a warrior among us," says Lieutenant G. S. Parsons, then not quite thirteen years of age and a first-class volunteer on board the *Barfleur* (98). During the succeeding hours of darkness the low and distant rumble of signal guns proved the truth of the Commodore's assertion. The enemy's fleet of twenty-seven sail-of-the-line and twelve 84-gun frigates was certainly hastening in the direction of Jervis. It had sailed from Cadiz for a very important purpose. After concentrating with the Toulon fleet the allies were to attempt to raise the English blockade of Brest, thus releasing the important armament there, gain command of the Channel, and invade Ireland. We shall have occasion to notice that in later years Napoleon conceived a similar idea. It is open to question whether Admiral Don Josef de Cordova would have been quite so eager for the fray had he known the full British strength. He believed it to be nine sail-of-the-line, whereas fifteen battleships and seven smaller vessels were awaiting his coming. When the signal-lieutenant of the *Barfleur* exclaimed of the oncoming leeward line of vessels, "They loom like Beachy Head in a fog! By my soul, they are thumpers, for I distinctly make out *four* tier of ports in one of them, bearing an admiral's flag," he expressed plain, honest fact. "Don Cordova, in the *Santissima Trinidad*," Jervis correctly surmised, "and I trust in Providence that we shall reduce this mountain into a mole hill before sunset." The Spanish flag-ship was the largest vessel afloat, and carried 180 guns.

She must have towered above the insignificant *Captain* (74), to which Nelson had transferred his broad pennant, much like an elephant over a Shetland pony. Nor was the *Santissima Trinidad* the only vessel built on what was then considered to be colossal lines. No fewer than six of the Spanish three-deckers carried 112 guns each; two of them had 80 guns each, and seventeen were 74-gun ships. England was represented by two sail-of-the-line of 100 guns each, two of 98 each, ten of 74 each, and one of 64.

"The British had formed one of the most beautiful and close lines ever beheld," Parsons tells us. "The fog drew up like a curtain, and disclosed the grandest sight I ever witnessed. The Spanish fleet, close on our weather bow, were making the most awkward attempts to form their line of battle, and they looked a complete forest huddled together; their commander-in-chief, covered with signals, and running free on his leeward line, using his utmost endeavours to get them into order; but they seemed confusion worse confounded. I was certainly very young, but felt so elated as to walk on my toes, by way of appearing taller, as I bore oranges to the admiral and captain, selecting some for myself, which I stored in a snug corner in the stern-galley, as a *corps de reserve*. The breeze was just sufficient to cause all the sails to sleep, and we were close hauled on the starboard tack, with royals set, heading up for the Spanish fleet. Our supporting ship, in the well-formed line, happened to be the *Captain*, and Captain Dacres hailed to say that he was desired by the vice-admiral to express his pleasure at being supported by Sir Horatio Nelson."<sup>1</sup>

Men famous in British naval annals were present at this memorable contest, fought on St Valentine's Day, 1797. Jervis was in the *Victory* (100), Troubridge in the *Culloden* (74), Collingwood in the *Excellent* (74), and Saumarez in the *Orion* (74). Twenty-four

<sup>1</sup> Parsons gives Nelson the title which he had not then won. See *post*, p. 85.

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years before Troubridge and Nelson had sailed together in the *Seahorse*; Collingwood was the Commodore's life-long friend, and Saumarez, whom the great little man did not like, was to become second in command at the battle of the Nile eighteen months later.

"England," the Admiral averred, "was in need of a victory," and he gave her one. Jervis was indeed a doughty champion of his country's rights at sea. "The British Admiral made the signal to prepare for battle," says an eye-witness. "As he walked the quarter-deck the hostile numbers were reported to him, as they appeared, by signal. 'There are eight sail-of-the-line, Sir John.' 'Very well, sir.' 'There are twenty-five sail-of-the-line.' 'Very well, sir.' 'There are twenty-seven sail, Sir John,' and this was accompanied by some remark on the great disparity of the forces. 'Enough, sir—no more of that: the die is cast; and if there were fifty sail-of-the-line, I would go through them.' " Sir Benjamin Hallowell-Carew, then a supernumerary on the quarter-deck of the *Victory*, disregarding the austerity of naval etiquette and thinking only of the determined utterance of the grim old veteran, so far forgot himself as to give the Admiral a hearty slap on the back.

The Spanish fleet was in two divisions of twenty-one and six sail-of-the-line respectively, separated by a distance of some miles. Three of the main squadron joined the latter a little later, while one "sailed away." Jervis's fleet, in single column, separated the two lines. By a skilful manœuvre he held in check the smaller division and brought his ships to bear on the larger, the *Culloden* being the first vessel to attack, which elicited warm praise of Troubridge from Jervis. The fight at once became general and was waged for some time without decisive results. Then several of the leading Spanish ships endeavoured to get round the rear of the British. Had they succeeded in doing so it would have enabled them to join the detached leeward division and escape to Cadiz. Nelson at once

discerned the project, and without hesitation placed the *Captain* in the path of the oncoming ships. He "dashed in among the Spanish van," to quote Parsons, "totally unsupported, leaving a break in the British line—conduct totally unprecedented, and only to be justified by the most complete success with which it was crowned. . . ."

The *Captain*, the smallest 74 in the fleet, stood a good chance of being annihilated by the oncoming squadron of Spanish ships, which included the *San-tissima Trinidad*, a gigantic four-decker. Lieutenant-Colonel Drinkwater, who was an eye-witness, tells us that for a considerable time Nelson "had to contend not only with her, but with her seconds ahead and astern, of three decks each. While he maintained this unequal combat, which was viewed with admiration, mixed with anxiety, his friends were flying to his support: and the enemy's attention was soon directed to the *Culloden*, Captain Troubridge; and, in a short time after, to the *Blenheim*, of 90 guns, Captain Frederick; who, very opportunely, came to his assistance.

"The intrepid conduct of the Commodore staggered the Spanish admiral, who already appeared to waver in pursuing his intention of joining the ships cut off by the British fleet; when the *Culloden's* arrival, and Captain Troubridge's spirited support of the *Captain*, together with the approach of the *Blenheim*, followed by Rear-Admiral Parker, with the *Prince George*, *Orion*, *Irresistible*, and *Diadem*, not far distant, determined the Spanish admiral to change his design altogether, and to make the signal for the ships of his main body to haul their wind, and make sail on the larboard tack.

"Advantage was now apparent, in favour of the British squadron, and not a moment was lost in improving it. As the ships of Rear-Admiral Parker's division approached the enemy's ships, in support of the *Captain*, and her gallant seconds, the *Blenheim* and *Culloden*, the cannonade became more animated and impressive. The superiority of the British fire

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over that of the enemy, and its effects on the enemy's hulls and sails, were so evident that there was no longer any hesitation in pronouncing a glorious termination of the contest.

"The British squadron at this time was formed in two divisions, both on the larboard tack<sup>1</sup>: Rear-Admiral Parker, with the *Blenheim*, *Culloden*, *Prince George*, *Captain*, *Orion*, and *Irresistible*, composed one division, which was engaged with the enemy's rear; Sir John Jervis, with the other division, consisting of the *Excellent*, *Victory*, *Barfleur*, *Namur*, *Egmont*, *Goliath*, and *Britannia*, was pressing forward in support of his advanced squadron, but had not yet approached the real scene of action.

"While the British advanced squadron warmly pressed the enemy's centre and rear, the Admiral meditated, with his division, a co-operation which must effectually compel some of them to surrender.

"In the confusion of their retreat, several of the enemy's ships had doubled on each other; and, in the rear, they were three or four deep. It was, therefore, the British admiral's design to reach the weathermost of these ships; and, then, to bear up, and rake them all in succession, with the seven ships composing his division. His object, afterwards, was to pass on to the support of his van division; which, from the length of time they had been engaged, he judged might be in want of it. The casual position, however, of the rear ships of his van division, prevented his executing this plan. The admiral, therefore, ordered the *Excellent*, the leading ship of his own division, to bear up; and, with the *Victory*, he himself passed to leeward of the enemy's rearmost and leewardmost ships; which, though almost silenced in their fire, continued obstinately to resist the animated attack of all their opponents.

"Captain Collingwood, in the *Excellent*, in obedience to the admiral's orders, passed between the two rearmost ships of the enemy's line; giving to the one most

<sup>1</sup> "Larboard" has now been superseded by "port," i.e. the left.

to windward, a 74, so effectual a broadside, in addition to what had been done before, that her captain was induced to submit. The *Excellent* afterwards bore down on the ship to leeward, a three-decker: but, observing the *Orion* engaged with her, and the *Victory* approaching her, he threw into her only a few discharges of musquetry, and passed on to the support of the *Captain*, at that time warmly engaged with a three-decker, carrying a flag. His interference here was opportune, as the continual and long fire of the *Captain* had almost expended the ammunition she had at hand, and the loss of her fore-topmast, and other injuries she had received in her rigging, had rendered her nearly ungovernable.

"The Spanish three-decker had lost her mizen-mast; and, before the *Excellent* arrived in her proper station to open on this ship, the three-decker dropped astern aboard of, and became entangled with, a Spanish two-decker, that was her second. Thus doubled on each other, the *Excellent* gave the two ships her fire; and then moved forwards to assist the headmost ships in their attack on the Spanish admiral, and the other ships of the enemy's centre.

"Meanwhile, Sir John Jervis, disappointed in his plan of raking the enemy's rear ships, and having directed, as before observed, the *Excellent* to bear up, ordered the *Victory* to be placed on the lee-quarter of the rearmost ship of the enemy, a three-decker; and having, by signal, ordered the *Irresistible* and *Diadem* to suspend their firing, threw into the three-decker so powerful a discharge, that her commander, seeing the *Barfleur* . . . ready to second the *Victory*, thought proper to strike to the British Commander-in-chief. Two of the enemy's ships had now surrendered; and the *Lively* frigate, and *Diadem*, had orders to secure the prizes. The next that fell were the two with which Commodore Nelson was engaged.

"While Captain Collingwood so nobly stepped in to his assistance, as already mentioned, Captain R. W.

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Miller, the Commodore's captain, was enabled to replenish his lockers with shot, and prepare for a renewal of the fight. No sooner, therefore, had the *Excellent* passed on, than the gallant Commodore renewed the battle.

"The three-decker with which he was before engaged having fallen aboard her second, that ship, of 84 guns, became now the Commodore's opponent. To her, therefore, he directed a vigorous fire; nor was it feebly returned, as the loss on board the *Captain* evinced, nearly twenty men being killed and wounded in a very few minutes. It was now that the various damages already sustained by that ship, through the long and arduous conflict which she had maintained, appearing to render a continuance of the contest in the usual way precarious, or perhaps impossible, that Commodore Nelson, unable to bear the idea of parting with an enemy of which he had so thoroughly assured himself, instantly resolved on a bold and decisive measure; and determined, whatever might be the event, to attempt his opponent sword in hand. The boarders were accordingly summoned, and orders given to lay his ship, the *Captain*, on board the enemy."

"At this time," says Nelson, "the *Captain* having lost her fore-topmast, not a sail, shroud, or rope left, her wheel shot away, and incapable of further service in the line, or in chase, I directed Captain Miller to put the helm a-starboard, and calling for the Boarders, ordered them to board. The Soldiers of the 69th Regiment, with an alacrity which will ever do them credit, and Lieutenant Pierson of the same Regiment, were amongst the foremost on this service. The first man who jumped into the Enemy's mizen-chains was Captain Berry, late my First Lieutenant (Captain Miller was in the very act of going also, but I directed him to remain); he was supported from our spritsail-yard, which hooked in the mizzen-rigging. A soldier of the 69th Regiment having broke the upper quarter-gallery window, jumped in, followed by myself and



others as fast as possible. I found the cabin-doors fastened, and some Spanish Officers fired their pistols; but having broke open the doors, the soldiers fired, and the Spanish Brigadier (Commodore with a Distinguishing Pendant) fell, as retreating to the quarter deck, on the larboard side, near the wheel. Having pushed on the quarter-deck, I found Captain Berry in possession of the poop, and the Spanish ensign hauling down. I passed with my people and Lieutenant Pierson on the larboard gangway to the forecastle, where I met two or three Spanish Officers prisoners to my seamen, and they delivered me their swords.

“At this moment, a fire of pistols or muskets opened from the Admiral’s stern gallery of the *San Josef*, I directed the soldiers to fire into her stern; and, calling to Captain Miller, ordered him to send more men into the *San Nicolas*, and directed my people to board the First-rate, which was done in an instant, Captain Berry assisting me into the main chains. At this moment a Spanish Officer looked over the quarter-deck rail, and said—‘they surrendered;’ from this most welcome intelligence it was not long before I was on the quarter-deck, when the Spanish Captain, with a bow, presented me his Sword, and said the Admiral was dying of his wounds below. I asked him, on his honour, if the Ship were surrendered? he declared she was; on which I gave him my hand, and desired him to call to his Officers and Ship’s company, and tell them of it—which he did; and on the quarter-deck of a Spanish First-rate, extravagant as the story may seem, did I receive the Swords of vanquished Spaniards; which, as I received, I gave to William Fearney, one of my bargemen, who put them with the greatest sangfroid under his arm.”

Nelson afterwards went on board the *Irresistible*. It was then late in the afternoon, and he did not think it advisable to take possession of the *Santissima Trinidad* because he was convinced that “a night Action with a still very superior Fleet” must inevitably follow.

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Jervis received the Commodore with great affection and was not sparing with well-deserved praise. The hero of the day was no less generous in acknowledging the services of Collingwood. He described his conduct as "noble and gallant." Nelson had no truer friend than the commander of the *Excellent*, whose admiration for the Commodore's genius knew no bounds. "The highest rewards are due to you and *Culloden*:" Collingwood replied, "you formed the plan of attack—we were only accessories to the Dons' ruin; for had they got on the other tack, they would have been sooner joined, and the business would have been less complete."

While the interest of the fight centres about the *Captain*, each ship contributed to the victory. In addition to Nelson's vessel, the *Colossus* and *Culloden* were badly battered but fortunately the loss in men was remarkably small. Four prizes fell to the British fleet on St Valentine's Day, 1797.

To his wife, Nelson confesses that "the more I think of our late action, the more I am astonished; it absolutely appears a dream. . . . The Spanish war will give us a cottage and a piece of ground, which is all I want. I shall come one day or other laughing back, when we will retire from the busy scenes of life: I do not, however, mean to be a hermit; the dons will give us a little money." This must not be taken too seriously, for within forty-eight hours of the battle he had confided to Sir Gilbert Elliot that "to take hereditary Honours without a fortune to support the Dignity, is to lower that Honour it would be my pride to support in proper splendour." He did not wish a "baronetage," but on the other hand, "There are Honours, which die with the possessor, and I should be proud to accept, if my efforts are thought worthy of the favour of my King." George III. created him a Knight of the Bath; Jervis became Earl of St Vincent. Six days after the battle Nelson was promoted to the rank of Rear-Admiral of the Blue, not as a reward for his meritorious conduct but as his due according to seniority.

A beautiful gold casket containing the much-coveted Freedom of the City and a sword of honour was given to Sir Horatio, as we must now call him, by the Corporation of London, and Norwich, where some of his school days were spent, likewise conferred its Freedom upon him. Nelson on his part presented the county town of Norfolk with the sword of the Spanish Rear-Admiral who had died of his wounds on board the *San Josef*. Other cities extended "the right hand of friendship" to the hero, including Bath and Bristol. Nelson's father was overcome when he heard of his son's brilliant success: "The height of glory to which your professional judgment, united with a proper degree of bravery, guarded by Providence, has raised you, few sons, my dear child, attain to, and fewer fathers live to see. Tears of joy have involuntarily trickled down my furrowed cheek. Who could stand the force of such general congratulation? The name and services of Nelson have sounded throughout the City of Bath, from the common ballad-singer to the public theatre. Joy sparkles in every eye, and desponding Britain draws back her sable veil, and smiles."

Although he had clearly disobeyed Jervis's order for the ships to attack in succession, the Commodore's daring action had rendered the battle decisive. Sir Robert Calder, the Captain of the Fleet, is said to have protested against Nelson's conduct, but the Admiral's reply, "If you ever commit such a breach of orders I will forgive you," was entirely worthy of the stern old disciplinarian. Jervis was not one of those officers who bestow praise on every possible occasion, both in and out of season. He was just, and therefore recognised the extremely valuable service which Nelson had rendered to him. We shall have occasion to see how Calder himself behaved at a certain critical period, when a stroke of genius such as had been displayed at St Vincent would have robbed Nelson of the glory of Trafalgar.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *post* p. 224.

## CHAPTER VII

# From Triumph to Failure: The Attempt on Santa Cruz

(1797)

*"I have had flattery enough to make me vain, and success enough to make me confident."*

NELSON.

ALL hopes on the part of Britain's enemies for the invasion of the British Isles were quashed for a time by the victory off Cape St Vincent. Although the distressed Spanish fleet reached Cadiz safely, minus four sail-of-the-line which the British had captured, there was no likelihood at the moment of the ships showing their "noses" out of port, many of the aforesaid noses being much out of joint. For several weeks Nelson was engaged in a fruitless search for a treasure-ship, convoyed by three sail-of-the-line, supposed to be making for Spain; but in April 1797 he was directed by the Admiral to blockade Cadiz, a task not altogether devoid of incident if for no other reason than that no neutral vessel was permitted to enter or leave the port without his permission. He was particularly concerned as to the welfare of the garrison at Elba. The Commander-in-Chief believed that the soldiers were on their way to Gibraltar; Nelson was of opinion that "If the French get out two sail-of-the-line, which I am confident they may do, our Troops are lost, and what a triumph would that be to them!" At his own suggestion he was sent to Porto

Ferrajo to make enquiries about the luckless little army. The convoy had started, and he met it off the south of Corsica. He learned of Napoleon's wonderful success in the subjugation of Italy and the humbling of Austria, admitting that "there seems no prospect of stopping these extraordinary people," the French. Shifting from the *Captain*, which required to be docked, he hoisted his rear-admiral's flag on the *Theseus*, and was given command of the inshore squadron of the fleet blockading the great seaport, "in sight of the whole Spanish Fleet. I am barely out of shot of a Spanish Rear-Admiral." The citizens not unnaturally dreaded a bombardment; Nelson confessed, "I long to be at them." At the same time he reverted to the old idea of a cottage in Norfolk. "The imperious call of honour to serve my Country," and a not ignoble desire to add to his prize money in order to give his wife "those little luxuries which you so highly merit," did not, however, permit him to give more than a passing thought to retirement.

On the night of the 3rd July 1797 all the barges and launches of the British blockading fleet, carrying carronades, ammunition and pikes, were placed at Nelson's disposal by the Earl of St Vincent for the bombardment of Cadiz. A spirited action took place between the British and Spanish sailors, the latter using mortar gunboats and armed launches. The Spanish met with a repulse and three prizes were taken. Referring to the blockade in his Autobiography, Nelson says: "It was during this period that perhaps my personal courage was more conspicuous than at any other part of my life," the remark obviously referring to the following incident. The barge of the Commander of the enemy's gunboats came up alongside Nelson's little craft, containing thirteen persons in all, and a desperate hand-to-hand fight ensued. The Rear-Admiral would have lost his life had it not been for the good services of John Sykes, the coxswain, one of those humble heroes of whom one hears too little, so

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predominant are the greater figures of history. The enemy paid dearly for the exploit. Eighteen of the crew were killed, several wounded, the Commander was taken prisoner, and the boat captured. On the 5th of the same month Cadiz was again bombarded, and according to the official despatch, the cannonade "produced considerable effect in the Town and among the Shipping." The Earl of St Vincent now proved how strict a disciplinarian he was. The crews of some of the ships had shown unmistakable signs of mutiny, and the Court Martial having passed sentence on four of the ringleaders, the Commander-in-Chief saw no reason for delaying the execution of the sentence. He had the men hanged on a Sunday, a few hours after they had been found guilty. Nelson strongly approved of the execution, "even although it is *Sunday*. The particular situation of the service requires extraordinary measures." It is significant that no signs of dissatisfaction made themselves felt in any of the Rear-Admiral's ships, but Nelson's words show that he would not have condoned anything of the kind.

An attack on Santa Cruz, where it was believed that the *Principe d'Asturias*, a ship of considerable value belonging to the Philippine Company, had taken shelter, next fell to Nelson's lot. He had already hinted to the Admiral that the conquest of Teneriffe was an object very dear to him, which he was confident "could not fail of success, would immortalize the undertakers, ruin Spain, and has every prospect of raising our Country to a higher pitch of wealth than she has ever yet attained. . . ." His plan was to utilise the 8700 soldiers from Elba; "I will undertake with a very small Squadron to do the Naval part." The scheme fell through, to be revived by the Earl himself, but it was to be carried out without the assistance of the troops. Three sail-of-the-line and the same number of frigates were placed at Nelson's disposal. Ladders, sledge-hammers, wedges, axes, additional iron ram-rods, and a sleigh for dragging cannon

formed a necessary part of the equipment. A perusal of the regulations recommended by the Rear-Admiral shows that he took the most elaborate precautions to ensure success. Captain Thomas Troubridge, of the *Culloden*, was given command of the entire force, Captain Oldfield directing the Marines, Lieutenant Baynes his detachment of the Royal Artillery. The first attempt was made on the night of the 21st and failed, largely owing to adverse weather. As a consequence the spot which Nelson had indicated as most suitable for landing was not reached, and dawn disclosed the whereabouts of the little expedition to the Spaniards. It was also found impossible to get the battle-ships close enough to the fort to create a diversion by bombardment while the storming party attempted to gain the heights.

Any blame which may have been attributable to Troubridge was minimised by Nelson in his despatch to the Admiral, "all has hitherto been done which was possible, without effect." He therefore decided to command in person, "and to-morrow my head will probably be crowned with either laurel or cypress." Did some premonition of disaster lead him to write to the Earl of St Vincent to recommend his step-son "to you and my Country," and to add that "should I fall in the service of my King and Country" the Duke of Clarence would "take a lively interest" in Josiah Nisbet? It was certainly not his way of saying things at this stage of his career, although we know that in 1805 he avowed that Trafalgar would be his last battle.

On the 24th Nelson was able to get his ships nearer land than on the previous occasion. He and nearly a thousand men set out in small boats at about eleven o'clock at night for the Mole, where they were to disembark. The oars being muffled and dead silence enjoined, the enemy did not discover their approach till they were within half gun-shot of the appointed *rendez-vous*. Immediately thirty or forty cannon blazed out, the sharp ping of musket shots rent the air, but, says Nelson,

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"nothing could stop the intrepidity of the Captains leading the divisions. Unfortunately, the greatest part of the Boats did not see the Mole, but went on shore through a raging surf, which stove all the Boats to the left of it."

With the companies of four or five boats and two Captains, the Rear-Admiral stormed the landing-place in the darkness and took possession of it in the presence of several hundred of the enemy. They then proceeded to spike the guns, but were driven back by the heavy fire which seemed to issue from every available point. Scarcely a man escaped death or a wound. Nelson was shot through the right elbow as he was stepping from the boat. With rare presence of mind he quietly transferred the sword he carried to his left hand. This weapon, once the property of his uncle Maurice Suckling, was treasured by him almost more than any other possession. He was not going to leave that of all things on Spanish soil! Young Nisbet happened to be near his step-father at the moment he received his wound, and placed him in the bottom of the boat. He then held the arm so as to staunch the blood, untied the silk handkerchief round his neck and bound up the injury as best he could. After passing under the enemy's batteries the few men who had regained the little craft bent to the oars and eventually pulled out of range of the guns, but not before some of the crew of the *Fox*, who had been flung into the sea owing to the sinking of that cutter, had been rescued by them. Someone suggested that Nelson should be taken to the nearest vessel for surgical treatment. He would not hear of this because the captain's wife happened to be on board and he had no intelligence of her husband's fate. Whatever agonies Nelson suffered, as the sadly denuded crew made their way to the *Theseus*, were kept to himself; scarcely a groan escaped his lips.

"At two o'clock [A.M.]," says a midshipman who saw the sorrowful boatload, "Admiral Nelson returned on board, being dreadfully wounded in the right arm



with a grape-shot. I leave you to judge of my situation, when I beheld our boat approach with him who I may say has been a second father to me, his right arm dangling by his side, whilst with the other he helped himself to jump up the Ship's side, and with a spirit that astonished every one, told the surgeon to get his instruments ready, for he knew he must lose his arm, and that the sooner it was off the better. He underwent the amputation with the same firmness and courage that have always marked his character."

Captain Troubridge and his men landed near the citadel after most of the ammunition had been soaked by the surf, which was so violent that it filled the boats and stove them against the treacherous rocks. With a handful of heroes he proceeded to the Square, previously appointed as the meeting-place of the various parties before the final attack. The scaling ladders having been lost, and no further men making their appearance after an hour's wait, he set out to meet Captains Hood and Miller, whom he believed had effected a landing elsewhere. "By day-break," runs his official report to Nelson, "we had collected about eighty Marines, eighty Pike-men, and one hundred and eighty small-arm Seamen. These, I found, were all that were alive that had made good their landing. With this force, having procured some ammunition from the Spanish prisoners we had made, we were marching to try what could be done with the Citadel without ladders; but found the whole of the streets commanded by field-pieces, and upwards of eight thousand Spaniards and one hundred French under arms, approaching by every avenue. As the boats were all stove, and I saw no possibility of getting more men on shore—the ammunition wet, and no provisions—I sent Captain Hood with a Flag of Truce to the Governor, to say I was prepared to burn the Town, which I should immediately put in force if he approached one inch further; and, at the same time, I desired Captain Hood to say it would be done with regret, as I had no

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wish to injure the inhabitants ; that if he would come to my terms, I was ready to treat, which he readily agreed to. . . .”

The terms were, “ That the Troops, etc., belonging to his Britannic Majesty shall embark with all their arms of every kind, and take their Boats off, if saved, and be provided with such other as may be wanting ; in consideration of which it is engaged on their part they shall not molest the Town in any manner by the Ships of the British Squadron now before it, or any of the Islands in the Canaries ; and prisoners shall be given up on both sides.”

Troubridge's game of bluff succeeded. His Excellency Don Antonio Gutierrez, Commandant-General of the Canary Islands, rid himself of the invaders and was rewarded by Nelson with a cask of English beer and a cheese !

It says much for Nelson's indomitable pluck and recuperative powers, as well as for his keen interest in the service, that he allowed only two days to intervene before he penned a letter with his left hand to the Admiral. That he was depressed is obvious, that he still had a fund of grim humour is equally evident by the quaint postscript. The communication runs as follows :

*Theseus, July 27th, 1797.*

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I am become a burthen to my friends, and useless to my Country ; but by my letter wrote the 24th,<sup>1</sup> you will perceive my anxiety for the promotion of my son-in-law, Josiah Nisbet.<sup>2</sup> When I leave your command, I become dead to the World ; I go hence, and am no more seen. If from poor Bowen's loss,<sup>3</sup> you think it proper to oblige me, I rest confident you will do it ; the Boy is under obligations to me, but he

<sup>1</sup> See *ante*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> The Earl of St Vincent appointed him a Master and Commander.

<sup>3</sup> Captain Richard Bowen, of H.M.S. *Terpsichore*, who was killed at Santa Cruz.

repaid me by bringing me from the Mole of Santa Cruz.

"I hope you will be able to give me a frigate, to convey the remains of my carcase to England. God bless you, my dear Sir, and believe me, your most obliged and faithful,

"HORATIO NELSON.

"You will excuse my scrawl, considering it is my first attempt.

"Sir John Jervis, K.Bth."

In another despatch to his senior officer the leader of the ill-fated expedition avers that "A left-handed Admiral will never again be considered as useful, therefore the sooner I get to a very humble cottage the better, and make room for a better man to serve the State." The noble Earl's reply must have been as healing balm to the wounded body and depressed spirit of the man whose brilliant success had been followed so quickly by disastrous failure. "Mortals cannot command success;" he begins, "you and your Companions have certainly deserved it, by the greatest degree of heroism and perseverance that ever was exhibited." Such praise from St Vincent was praise indeed, and he whimsically concludes by saying that he will "bow to your stump to-morrow morning, if you will give me leave."

On the 20th August 1797, Nelson struck his flag on the *Theseus* and hoisted it on the *Seahorse*, in which ship he made "a very miserable passage home." He arrived at Spithead on the 1st September and proceeded to Bath. To his brother he reported that his health "never was better, and my arm is in the fairest way of soon healing." He intended to journey to London, perhaps pay a short visit to Norfolk "for a few days, especially if a decent house is likely to be met with near Norwich; but Wroxham very far indeed exceeds my purse. Bath will be my home till next spring." On the other hand Lady Nelson wrote on the same

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date that her husband suffered "a good deal of pain—the arm is taken off very high, near the shoulder," and he only obtained rest by resorting to opium.

If he never minimised a victory in his communications Nelson certainly did not remark unduly on his wounds. In writing to the Duke of Clarence he merely referred to "my accident," and passed on to assure his royal friend "that not a scrap of that ardour with which I have hitherto served our King has been shot away." It is only right, however, to add that in communicating with the Comptroller of the Navy he was perhaps a little unjust to Troubridge in the matter of the initial attempt on Santa Cruz: "Had I been with the first party, I have reason to believe complete success would have crowned our endeavours.<sup>1</sup> My pride suffered; and although I felt the second attack a forlorn hope, yet the honour of our Country called for the attack, and that I should command it. I never expected to return, and am thankful."

On the 27th September, Nelson was invested with the Ensigns of the Order of the Bath by George III. at St James's Palace. In addition he was granted a pension of £1000 a year, having been "engaged against the Enemy upwards of one hundred and twenty times." He became a popular hero, but as he himself said, "Success covers a multitude of blunders, and the want of it hides the greatest gallantry and good conduct." Compared to the victory off Cape St Vincent the Santa Cruz fiasco was of little moment. Kind-hearted John Bull dismissed the latter incident and thought only of the former.

<sup>1</sup> This is in marked contrast to the generous words he wrote to the Earl of St Vincent on the 24th July.—See *ante*, p. 90.

## CHAPTER VIII

### In Chase of the French Fleet

(1798)

*"No Frigates!—to which has been, and may again, be attributed the loss of the French Fleet."*

NELSON.

THE year 1797 had been a particularly trying one for Nelson both as regards health and reputation; the succeeding twelve months were to test his powers of endurance and his skill even more. The services of the one-eyed, one-armed little man were not to be dispensed with, as he had suggested in a moment of despondency. He neither retired to "a very humble cottage," although he had purchased a small property known as Round Wood, near Ipswich, nor made room for "a better man." Truth to tell, there was no better man, and for once the Admiralty knew its business. Nelson hoisted his flag as Rear-Admiral of the Blue on board the *Vanguard* (74) at Spithead on the 29th March 1798, sailed for Lisbon with a convoy on the 10th April, and joined his old fleet off Cadiz on the last day of that month, the times "big with events." Within forty-eight hours he was ordered by St Vincent to ascertain the destination of an immense armament which was preparing at Toulon and other ports in the Mediterranean. For this important service a squadron of three sail-of-the-line, including his own ship, three frigates and a sloop were placed at his disposal. A small French corvette was captured, and by closely examining each

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member of the crew it was ascertained that although Bonaparte had appeared at the great French port it was not believed he would embark. The most important point of all, namely, the destination of the expedition, was not revealed: "all is secret."

While off Toulon, Nelson encountered one of the worst gales he ever experienced. His own account of the fight with this universal enemy lacks the picturesque details given by Captain Berry, of the *Vanguard*, and we shall therefore quote from Berry's letter. Nelson tells his wife that "it was the Almighty's goodness, to check my consummate vanity"; his more matter-of-fact captain sees only a natural cause. Just before sunset on Sunday, the 20th of May, it became evident that the spell of fine weather, which had been enjoyed hitherto, was over. The wind increased in violence so much that it became necessary to furl all the sails with the exception of a main storm-staysail. "At about two," says Berry, "the main-topmast went over the side, with the top-sailyard full of men. I dreaded the inquiry of who were killed and drowned; fortunately only one man fell overboard, and one fell on the booms, and was killed on the spot. At half-past two the mizen-topmast went over the side; the fore-mast gave an alarming crack, and at a quarter past three went by the board with a most tremendous crash, and, what was very extraordinary, it fell in two pieces across the fore-castle. Our situation was really alarming: the wreck of the fore-topmast and foremast hanging over the side, and beating against the Ship's bottom; the best bower-anchor was flung out of its place, and was also thumping the bottom; the wreck of the main topmast swinging violently against the main-rigging, every roll endangering the loss of the mainmast, which we expected to fall every moment: thus circumstanced, we endeavoured, though with but little hopes of success, to wear,<sup>1</sup> having no head-sail, and knowing we were driving on an Enemy's shore. Fortunately

<sup>1</sup> To bring the vessel round with her stern to the wind.

there was a small rag of the sprit-sail left, and by watching a favourable moment, we got her on the other tack. The bowsprit did not go, though it was sprung in three different places. The Ship rolled and laboured dreadfully, but did not make any water, more than we shipped over all. We cut the anchor from the bows, and got clear of the wreck, with the loss of a boat and top-sail-yard, etc., and were not apprehensive of our bottom being damaged. . . . For want of masts we rolled dreadfully. The storm did not abate till Tuesday afternoon, which enabled the *Alexander* to take us in tow. Our situation on Tuesday night was the most alarming I ever experienced. . . .” At one time Nelson was of opinion that both ships would go down, and wished the *Vanguard* to be cast off. Captain Alexander Ball, with whom the Rear-Admiral had struck up a slight acquaintance at St Omer on the occasion of his visit to France in 1783, would not hear of it, and brought the vessels safely to the shelter of the islands of San Pietro. After being patched-up the three sail-of-the-line again proceeded on their way to Toulon, minus the smaller craft which had parted company long since, and eventually returned to St Vincent’s fleet.

Fortune had played Nelson false. The Toulon fleet had escaped on the 19th May. While the three English battle-ships were riding out the gale it was making for Genoa, Ajaccio, and Civita Vecchia to rally transports. The destination of the expedition was Egypt; Malta the first object of prey. Shortly after the signature of the Treaty of Campo Formio on the 17th October 1797, which pacified the Continent for a time, Napoleon had returned in triumph to Paris from his victorious Italian Campaign. He was then appointed by the French Directory Commander of the Army of England, so called because the purpose for which it was brought into being was the subjugation of that country. Napoleon certainly devoted much of his time to the project, but soon came to the conclusion that the plan was not

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practicable at the moment. He dreamed of Oriental conquest, of occupying Egypt and invading India : " We may change the face of the world ! " How could the command of the Channel be secured when Admiral Lord Bridport commanded a formidable fleet in those waters and frequently appeared off Brest, when Admiral Lord Duncan patrolled the North Sea, and the naval highways of Spithead, the Downs, the Nore, St George's Channel, and the Bay of Biscay were strongly guarded by British fleets or divisions ? The Mediterranean seemed the only vulnerable point, for the Earl of St Vincent's fleet was alone stationed within striking distance of that great inland sea.

It is necessary at this point to briefly refer to the naval strength of Great Britain as compared with that of France. At the beginning of 1798 the Republic possessed fifty-seven sail-of-the-line, forty-six frigates and seventy-two smaller vessels, to which must be added nine remnants of the Venetian navy and whatever forces could be commanded from Spain and Holland. Fourteen sail-of-the-line, seventeen frigates, and three cutters were on the stocks in French shipyards. During the same year England had no fewer than one hundred and twenty line-of-battle ships and over five hundred smaller vessels at her disposal. The recent mutiny at the Nore had shown that there was some dissatisfaction in the British naval service, but the ships were not undermanned as in France, they were in finer condition, and the victories off Cape St Vincent and Camperdown had acted as a stimulant. If those before the mast occasionally grumbled, nothing further was heard of organised insubordination.

The Admiralty had now sent a reinforcement of eight battle-ships and two fire-ships to the Admiral, who was told " to lose no time in detaching from your Fleet a Squadron, consisting of twelve Sail-of-the-line, and a competent number of Frigates, under the command of some discreet Flag-Officer, into the Mediterranean, with instructions to him to proceed in quest



of the said Armament ;<sup>1</sup> and on falling in with it, or any other Force belonging to the Enemy, to take or destroy it." The officer was also "to remain upon this service so long as the provisions of the said Squadron will last, or as long as he may be enabled to obtain supplies from any of the ports in the Mediterranean." According to later orders supplies were to be exacted "from the territories of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, the King of the Two Sicilies, the Ottoman Territory, Malta, and ci-devant Venetian Dominions now belonging to the Emperor of Germany." The Dey of Algiers, the Bey of Tunis, and the Bashaw of Tripoli were also believed to be friendly. Lord Spencer, First Lord of the Admiralty, suggested Nelson as the most likely man for this extremely important service. Several eminent personages claimed to have aided him in his selection, including Sir Gilbert Elliot and the King.

Sir Horatio was accordingly given command of a squadron which numbered thirteen line-of-battle ships, all carrying seventy-four guns, and one fifty-gun ship, the *Leander*. St Vincent's selection awoke the ire of Nelson's two seniors in the Earl's fleet, namely, Sir William Parker and Sir John Orde. As we have seen, the Admiral had scarcely a voice in the matter, and subsequent events abundantly confirmed the wisdom of the appointment. Unfortunately there were no frigates, "the eyes of a fleet." As to the destination of Napoleon and his army of adventurers, the Rear-Admiral was not far wrong when he wrote to Lord Spencer on the 15th June, after interrogating the captain of a Tunisian cruiser who had seen them on the 4th off Trapani, that "If they pass Sicily, I shall believe they are going on their scheme of possessing Alexandria, and getting troops to India—a plan concerted with Tippoo Saib, by no means so difficult as might at first view be imagined ; but be they bound to the Antipodes, your Lordship may rely that I will not lose a moment in bringing them to Action, and endeavour to destroy their Trans-

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the Toulon fleet.

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ports." Off Messina he heard that the French had taken possession of Malta. After discussing the matter with his captains he decided to sail for Alexandria, which he reached two days before the enemy's arrival. He then "stretched the Fleet over to the Coast of Asia," and "passed close to the southern side of Candia, but without seeing one Vessel in our route." This was the position on the 12th July, when he was still "without the smallest information of the French Fleet since their leaving Malta." A week later the squadron anchored in Syracuse harbour to obtain water and provisions, set off again on the 25th, and on the 28th the important news was obtained that about a month before the French fleet had been seen sailing in the direction of the south-east from Candia. To Nelson this intelligence meant but one destination—Alexandria. His surmise was correct: "I attacked at sunset on the 1st of August, off the Mouth of the Nile."

## CHAPTER IX

### The Battle of the Nile

1798

*As long as Egypt's pyramids shall stand,  
Long as the Nile shall fertilize her land;  
So long the voice of never-dying fame  
Shall add to England's glory Nelson's name!*

W. T. FITZGERALD.

IT is difficult for a landsman to appreciate the joy with which Nelson's captains, his "Band of Brothers," as he called them, as well as the men of lower rank, beheld the enemy moored in line of battle parallel with the shore in Aboukir Bay on what might well be termed "the glorious first of August." They had been searching the Mediterranean for long, weary weeks, anxious to try conclusions with Napoleon's fleet, but thwarted at every turn by lack of information. At last they were face to face, led by an admiral of unequalled resolution in whom they placed implicit confidence.

"The utmost joy," says Berry,<sup>1</sup> "seemed to animate every breast on board the Squadron, at sight of the Enemy; and the pleasure which the Admiral himself felt, was perhaps more heightened than that of any other man, as he had now a certainty by which he could regulate his future operations. The Admiral had, and it appeared most justly, the highest opinion of, and placed

<sup>1</sup> His "Authentic Narrative" of the battle was published in 1798, and is a plain, straightforward account of Nelson's first great naval action without a superior in command. We shall have occasion to quote it freely in this chapter. Berry was Nelson's captain.

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the firmest reliance on, the valour and conduct of every Captain in his Squadron. It had been his practice during the whole of the cruize, whenever the weather and circumstances would permit, to have his Captains on board the *Vanguard*, where he would fully develop to them his own ideas of the different and best modes of attack, and such plans as he proposed to execute upon falling in with the Enemy, whatever their position or situation might be, by day or by night. There was no possible position in which they could be found, that he did not take into his calculation, and for the most advantageous attack of which he had not digested and arranged the best possible disposition of the force which he commanded. With the masterly ideas of their Admiral, therefore, on the subject of Naval tactics, every one of the Captains of his Squadron was most thoroughly acquainted; and upon surveying the situation of the Enemy, they could ascertain with precision what were the ideas and intentions of their Commander, without the aid of any further instructions; by which means signals became almost unnecessary, much time was saved, and the attention of every Captain could almost undistractedly be paid to the conduct of his own particular Ship, a circumstance from which, upon this occasion, the advantages to the general service were almost incalculable."

We must now try to understand the strength and position of the French fleet. It consisted of thirteen line-of-battle ships, three carrying eighty guns and one one hundred and twenty guns, and four frigates. Napoleon, who was far away adding triumph to triumph, had left Admiral Brueys with three alternative plans. He could enter the port of Alexandria, Aboukir Roads, or sail for Corfu, leaving the transports at Alexandria. Brueys soon found that the harbour scarcely held sufficient water for the navigation of his largest ships. Once inside, it would be next to impossible to get them out in front of a hostile fleet on account of the narrow exit. He chose Aboukir Bay, in a position some ten miles from the

Rosetta mouth of the Nile. Here he anchored his thirteen battle-ships, with great gaps between them, in a line roughly parallel with the shore, and flanked by gunboats and frigates. His van was placed as close to Aboukir Island as was practicable. Dr Fitchett has rather overstated the case in saying that "a battery of mortars on the island guarded, as with a sword of fire, the gap betwixt the headmost ship and the island."<sup>1</sup> In another place he also refers to the head of the French line being "protected by a powerful shore battery."<sup>2</sup> There were certainly a few guns, but "a sword of fire" suggests a heavy armament, and Napoleon had occasion later to severely criticise the Admiral's arrangement in this matter.<sup>3</sup> Brueys was ill, his marines had almost got out of hand, many of the sailors were raw recruits, and subversive of discipline, and some of the vessels were scarcely seaworthy. In tonnage and guns the French had the advantage, in *morale* and fighting capacity, the British were first.

Nelson determined to sail between Brueys' line and the shallows. Five British ships, led by the *Goliath*, crossed the bows of the first ship of the French van, inshore of the enemy's line, and anchored abreast of one of the Frenchmen, while three more, including Nelson's *Vanguard*, stationed themselves on the outer side. Some of the captains for various reasons were unable to take up their correct fighting positions, the *Culloden*, for instance, struck a shoal and took no part in the battle. The enemy's van was surrounded and conquered; the centre became engaged; the rear alone escaped, Villeneuve, its commander, making off with two battleships and two frigates without attempting to fight.

"The actions," Captain Berry relates, "commenced at sunset, which was at thirty-one minutes past six, p.m., with an ardour and vigour which it is impossible to describe. At about seven o'clock total darkness had

<sup>1</sup> See "Deeds that Won the Empire," p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> See *Comment*, ii. 341-2, also Mahan's "Sea Power," i. 269.

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come on, but the whole hemisphere was, with intervals, illuminated by the fire of the hostile Fleets. Our Ships, when darkness came on, had all hoisted their distinguishing lights, by a signal from the Admiral. The Van ship of the Enemy, *Le Guerrier*, was dismasted in less than twelve minutes, and, in ten minutes after, the second ship, *Le Conquérant*, and the third, *Le Spartiate*, very nearly at the same moment were almost dismasted. *L'Aquilon* and *Le Peuple Souverain*, the fourth and fifth Ships of the Enemy's line, were taken possession of by the British at half-past eight in the evening. Captain Berry, at that hour, sent Lieutenant Galwey, of the *Vanguard*, with a party of marines, to take possession of *Le Spartiate*, and that officer returned by the boat, the French Captain's sword, which Captain Berry immediately delivered to the Admiral, who was then below, in consequence of the severe wound which he had received in the head during the heat of the attack. At this time it appeared that victory had already declared itself in our favour, for, although *L'Orient*, *L'Heureux*, and *Tonnant* were not taken possession of, they were considered as completely in our power, which pleasing intelligence Captain Berry had likewise the satisfaction of communicating in person to the Admiral. At ten minutes after ten, a fire was observed on board *L'Orient*, the French Admiral's Ship, which seemed to proceed from the after part of the cabin, and which increased with great rapidity, presently involving the whole of the after part of the Ship in flames. This circumstance Captain Berry immediately communicated to the Admiral, who, though suffering severely from his wound, came up upon deck, where the first consideration that struck his mind was concern for the danger of so many lives, to save as many as possible of whom he ordered Captain Berry to make every practicable exertion. A boat, the only one that could swim, was instantly dispatched from the *Vanguard*, and other Ships that were in a condition to do so, immediately followed the example; by which means, from the best possible

information, the lives of about seventy Frenchmen were saved.<sup>1</sup> The light thrown by the fire of *L'Orient* upon the surrounding objects, enabled us to perceive with more certainty the situation of the two Fleets, the colours of both being clearly distinguishable. The cannonading was partially kept up to leeward of the Centre till about ten o'clock, when *L'Orient* blew up with a most tremendous explosion. An awful pause and death-like silence for about three minutes ensued, when the wreck of the masts, yards, etc., which had been carried to a vast height, fell down into the water, and on board the surrounding Ships. A port fire from *L'Orient* fell into the main royal of the *Alexander*, the fire occasioned by which was, however, extinguished in about two minutes, by the active exertions of Captain Ball.

"After this awful scene, the firing was recommenced with the Ships to leeward of the Centre, till twenty minutes past ten, when there was a total cessation of firing for about ten minutes; after which it was revived till about three in the morning, when it again ceased. After the victory had been secured in the Van, such British ships as were in a condition to move, had gone down upon the fresh Ships of the Enemy, which occasioned these renewals of the fight, all of which terminated with the same happy success in favour of our Flag. At five minutes past five in the morning, the two Rear ships of the Enemy, *Le Guillaume Tell* and *Le Généreux*, were the only French ships of the Line that had their colours flying. At fifty-four minutes past five, a French frigate, *L'Artemise*, fired a broadside and struck her colours; but such was the unwarrantable and infamous conduct of the French Captain, that after having thus surrendered, he set fire to his Ship, and with part of his crew, made his escape on shore. Another of the French frigates, *La Sérieuse*, had been sunk by the fire from some of our Ships; but as her poop remained above water,

<sup>1</sup> Among those who perished were Commodore Casabianca and his young son, whose bravery is immortalised in the well-known poem by Mrs Hemans.

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her men were saved upon it, and were taken off by our boats in the morning. The *Bellerophon*, whose masts and cables had been entirely shot away, could not retain her situation abreast of *L'Orient*, but had drifted out of the line to the lee side of the Bay, a little before that Ship blew up. The *Audacious* was in the morning detached to her assistance. At eleven o'clock, *Le Généreux* and *Guillaume Tell*, with the two frigates, *La Justice* and *La Diane*, cut their cables and stood out to sea, pursued by the *Zealous*, Captain Hood, who, as the Admiral himself has stated, handsomely endeavoured to prevent their escape; but as there was no other Ship in a condition to support the *Zealous*, she was recalled. The whole day of the 2nd was employed in securing the French ships that had struck, and which were now all completely in our possession, *Le Tonnant* and *Timoleon* excepted; as these were both dismasted, and consequently could not escape, they were naturally the last of which we thought of taking possession. On the morning of the third, the *Timoleon* was set fire to, and *Le Tonnant* had cut her cable and drifted on shore, but that active officer, Captain Miller, of the *Theseus*, soon got her off again, and secured her in the British line."

It was a decisive victory, the only kind of victory that appealed to Nelson, who styled it a "conquest." Of the thirteen French battleships, nine were taken, one was blown up, one was burnt, and two escaped; one frigate sank, another was destroyed by fire, and two got away. Napoleon had been deprived of his only means of communication with France. Thus the sea swallowed his triumphs. From a political point of view the battle of the Nile paved the way for the formation of the Second Coalition against France, in which six Powers took part, namely, England, Russia, Austria, Turkey, Naples, and Portugal.

Nelson received his wound by being struck in the forehead by a piece of iron. The skin was torn so badly that it hung over his face, the blood streaming down with such profusion that he was afraid his left eye had



gone like the right. "I am killed"; he cried to Captain Berry, "remember me to my wife." But the Admiral had been "killed" in battle before, and the intense pain of the wound sufficiently justified the exclamation. He was carried to the cockpit, the cut bound up, and strict quiet enjoined. This was easier said than done with a patient such as Nelson. His abnormal mentality speedily gained ascendancy over his physical infirmities. He soon declared that he felt better, and shortly afterwards had so far recovered as to begin a dictated despatch to the Admiralty. On the Captain informing him that *L'Orient* was ablaze he insisted on clambering to the deck, as we have seen. Berry gave him his arm, and together they witnessed the disaster. Nelson was certainly more fortunate than Brueys, who was shot almost in two.

On the 2nd August the Admiral returned Public Thanksgiving on the *Vanguard*, an example he desired to be followed on every ship "as soon as convenient." He also took the opportunity to thank the men of the squadron for the part they had played in the late action: "It must strike forcibly every British Seaman, how superior their conduct is, when in discipline and good order, to the riotous behaviour of lawless Frenchmen."

In those days precedent was a fetish. To depart from what had previously obtained was not to be thought of, much less suggested. For this reason Nelson was created a Baron, the lowest rank in the peerage, but the highest that had been conferred "on an officer of your standing," as he was informed. In addition he was voted a pension of £2000 a year, which was also to be paid to his two next heirs.

Mention of the "great and brilliant Victory" was made in the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament, its organiser received the thanks of both Houses, as well as of the Parliament of Ireland, and many foreign potentates and British Corporations paid him honour. Among the numerous presents he received were two boxes set with diamonds, a superb diamond aigrette,

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a gold-headed cane, pieces of valuable plate, and a coffin. The latter, made of wood and iron from the ill-fated *L'Orient*, was sent to him by Captain Hallowell. By a strange coincidence Thanksgiving services were held in the churches of the United Kingdom on the 21st October, a date ever associated with Nelson, because of Trafalgar. It may be thought that there was unnecessary delay, but it must be remembered that the wonders of telegraphy were then undreamed of. News of the victory was not received in London until the fifty-seventh day after the event. "God be praised," writes the Earl of St Vincent, "and you and your gallant band rewarded by a grateful Country, for the greatest Achievement the history of the world can produce." Perhaps this noble sentiment from the Commander-in-chief was valued above the insignificant rewards of the Government.

To "Fighting" Berry Nelson entrusted the charge of his despatches for the Admiral, for which purpose he was given the *Leander* (50). With grim irony Fate played a trick entirely unworthy so gallant an officer. On the 18th August, off Gozo, near Candia, the *Généreuse*, which it will be remembered escaped from Nelson's vengeance at the Nile, appeared on the horizon. The frigate attempted to show "a clean pair of heels," but recognising that the enemy was gaining in the race, sail was shortened and the decks cleared for action. The brave defenders of the *Leander* resisted manfully for over six hours until the mastless, rudderless hulk could be fought no longer. Berry, who was wounded, together with the officers and crew were landed at Corfu and thence sent to Trieste, where the officers were released on *parole*, and the crew kept prisoners. On being exchanged, the captain received the honour of knighthood, a reward richly deserved and valiantly won. Berry got even with the French after all, for in 1799 he turned the tables on the victors by capturing the *Généreuse* with Nelson's flagship, the *Foudroyant*.

Captain Sir James Saumarez, with twelve ships of the

squadron, was directed to convoy the best of the prizes to Gibraltar, the remainder, being valueless, were set on fire. Hood was called upon to blockade Alexandria, and two of the battleships were sent to Naples for very necessary repairs. To this port the *Vanguard* laboriously followed. Nelson was "taken with a fever, which has very near done my business : for eighteen hours, my life was thought to be past hope ; I am now up, but very weak both in body and mind, from my cough and this fever." This was on the 20th September, two days before "the wreck of *Vanguard* arrived in the Bay of Naples." The occasion was one of great rejoicing on the part of the Silician Court. Miss Knight, the daughter of Rear-Admiral Sir Joseph Knight, who was present, thus records the events of the 22nd inst. :

"In the evening, went out with Sir William and Lady Hamilton, music, &c., to meet Admiral Nelson, who in the *Vanguard*, with the *Thalia* Frigate (Captain Newhouse) was seen coming in. We went on board, about a league out at sea, and sailed in with him : soon after us, the King came on board, and staid till the anchor was dropped. He embraced the Admiral with the greatest warmth, and said he wished he could have been in the engagement,<sup>1</sup> and served under his orders ; and that he likewise wished he could have been in England, when the news of the victory arrived there. He went down to see the Ship, and was delighted to perceive the care taken of a wounded man, who had two to serve him, and one reading to him. He asked to see the hat which saved the Admiral's life, when he was wounded in the head with a splinter. The Queen was taken with a fit of the ague when she was coming on board with the Princesses. Commodore Caraccioli came soon after the King, and many of the Neapolitan nobility, bands of music, &c. It happened to be the anniversary of our King's coronation. The Admiral came on shore with us, and said, it was the first time he had been out of his Ship for six months, except once on board Lord St

<sup>1</sup> Battle of the Nile.



Nelson wounded at Santa Cruz  
R. Caton Woodville



## The Battle of the Nile III

Vincent.<sup>1</sup> The Russian Ambassador and all the Legation came out to meet him. When we landed at the Health Office, the applauses and the crowd of people were beyond description. Admiral Nelson is little, and not remarkable in his person either way; but he has great animation of countenance, and activity in his appearance: his manners are unaffectedly simple and modest. He lodges at Sir William Hamilton's, who has given him the upper apartment. The whole City is mad with joy."

There was indeed every reason for this jubilation. A starless night seemed about to give place to a golden dawn. Towards the end of 1796 Napoleon's astounding successes had obliged Ferdinand, King of the Two Sicilies, to agree to terms of peace, especially as the English had decided to evacuate the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> The situation became more and more ominous. Consequently when Queen Maria Carolina, Ferdinand's energetic consort, heard that the King of Spain was about to ally himself to the hated Republic, she speedily informed Sir William Hamilton, the English Ambassador.<sup>3</sup> She realised that the hope of the kingdom depended not in half-measures of friendship towards England, but in securing her definite assistance and casting off the French yoke. Hamilton in his turn warned his Government of the proposed arrangement, which seemed likely to have far-reaching consequences and to threaten England in the Mediterranean. Her Majesty also kept up a secret correspondence with London. She was therefore particularly relieved when information arrived that the protection of the Two Sicilies against potential French despoilers was to be entrusted to the Hero of the Nile.

<sup>1</sup> Miss Knight is referring to the Earl of St Vincent's flagship, and not to a vessel named after him.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>3</sup> He had held the position since 1766.

## CHAPTER X

# The Neapolitan Court and Lady Hamilton

*"Down, down with the French!" is my constant prayer."*  
NELSON.

**T**RUTH has no secrets. It is the duty of the historian to reveal all and to hide nothing. The archæologist with pick and spade unearths a buried city, disclosing alike the mansions of the wealthy and the hovels of the poor. In describing the result of his researches the investigator would betray his science were he merely to mention the beauties of the king's palace, the tessellated pavements, the marble columns. The hideous back street must also tell its drab story, for aristocrat and plebeian are alike members of the Commonwealth.

The pen is the scalpel of history. It must neither condone nor palliate, although justice may be tempered with mercy.

Temptation came to Nelson at Naples, and he fell. Physically frail, he proved morally frail as well, but we must not unhesitatingly condemn him. Vanity caused him to stumble, and before he had time to realise the consequences a woman had sullied his reputation and tarnished his glory. Probably no reputable biographer of the great Admiral has penned the chapter dealing with this phase of his life without a wish that he could be excused from the necessity of doing so.

No sooner do we begin to investigate the relations between Nelson and Lady Hamilton than we are in a

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maze of perplexities. He was ill and she nursed him, he was victorious and she praised him, she was beautiful and he admired loveliness, she had a warm heart and he was susceptible, his wife was reserved and his "friend" was vivacious. The spider and the fly have their counterpart in real life. Once in the entangled meshes of the web Nelson never found his way out, even supposing he had wished to do so, which his passionate letters do not for a moment suggest.

When the *Vanguard* hove in sight off Naples, King Ferdinand, Sir William Hamilton, Lady Hamilton, and others went to meet "our liberator." In writing to Earl Spencer, Nelson says, "You will not, my Lord, I trust, think that one spark of vanity induces me to mention the most distinguished reception that ever, I believe, fell to the lot of a human being, but that it is a measure of justice due to his Sicilian Majesty and the Nation. If God knows my heart, it is amongst the most humble of the creation, full of thankfulness and gratitude!" No one doubts the latter portion of the remark. Nelson always exhibited a lively trust in an All-wise Providence. The "one spark of vanity" was self-deception, although perhaps "pride" would be more correct than "vanity," for the vain man usually distrusts his own opinion in setting great store by himself and wishes it to be confirmed by others. The Admiral was nothing if not self-reliant. Those who have read his voluminous correspondence and the memoirs of those with whom he came in contact cannot be blind to the fault of which he was seemingly in ignorance.

For instance, the writer of the "Croker Papers" furnishes us with the following particulars of the one and only occasion on which Nelson and Wellington had conversation. The latter noted the Admiral's weak point at once:

"We were talking of Lord Nelson, and some instances were mentioned of the egotism and vanity that derogated from his character. 'Why,' said the Duke, 'I am not surprised at such instances, for Lord Nelson was,



in different circumstances, two quite different men, as I myself can vouch, though I only saw him once in my life, and for, perhaps, an hour. It was soon after I returned from India.<sup>1</sup> I went to the Colonial Office in Downing Street, and there I was shown into the little waiting-room on the right hand, where I found, also waiting to see the Secretary of State, a gentleman, whom from his likeness to his pictures and the loss of an arm, I immediately recognised as Lord Nelson. He could not know who I was, but he entered at once into conversation with me, if I can call it conversation, for it was almost all on his side and all about himself, and in, really, a style so vain and so silly as to surprise and almost disgust me. I suppose something that I happened to say may have made him guess that I was *somebody*, and he went out of the room for a moment, I have no doubt to ask the office-keeper who I was, for when he came back he was altogether a different man, both in manner and matter. All that I had thought a charlatan style had vanished, and he talked of the state of this country and of the aspect and probabilities of affairs on the Continent with a good sense, and a knowledge of subjects both at home and abroad, that surprised me equally and more agreeably than the first part of our interview had done; in fact, he talked like an officer and a statesman. The Secretary of State kept us long waiting, and certainly, for the last half or three-quarters of an hour, I don't know that I ever had a conversation that interested me more. Now, if the Secretary of State had been punctual, and admitted Lord Nelson in the first quarter of an hour, I should have had the same impression of a light and trivial character that other people have had, but luckily I saw enough to be satisfied that he was really a very superior man; but certainly a more sudden and complete metamorphosis I never saw.'"

To sum up the whole matter. Pride, or vanity if you prefer it, laid Nelson open to the great temptation

<sup>1</sup> In 1804

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of his life, and it assailed him at a time when he was ill and suffering. He was by nature sympathetic and grateful, and could not fail to be impressed by the ministrations of Lady Hamilton during his sickness, any less than by her flattery—a hero-worship which may, or may not, have been sincere on her part.

Josceline Percy, who was on the *Victory* in the trying times of 1803, has some sage remarks to offer in this matter. Though the Christian faith "did not keep him from the fatal error of his life," Percy says, "it ought to be remembered that few were so strongly tempted, and I believe it may safely be affirmed that had Nelson's home been made to him, what a wife of good temper and judgment would have rendered it, never would he have forsaken it."

The candid friend, though seldom loved, is oftentimes the best friend. Nelson was warned of his mad infatuation for Lady Hamilton by more than one person who desired to save him from himself, but the fatal spell which she exerted upon him held him beyond reclamation.

On meeting the Admiral Lady Hamilton fainted away, and we find the hero writing to his wife that "she is one of the very best women in this world; she is an honour to her sex. Her kindness, with Sir William's, to me, is more than I can express: I am in their house, and I may now tell you, it required all the kindness of my friends to set me up." A week or so later, he says, "The continued kind attention of Sir William and Lady Hamilton must ever make you and I love them, and they are deserving the love and admiration of all the world."

We must now return to the scene of the tragedy. Italy was in a turmoil. Berthier had appeared before Rome, the aged Pontiff had been dragged from his palace and sent into Tuscany, a Republic set up, and an offensive and defensive alliance entered into with Revolutionary France. By his placing the citadel of Turin in the hands of the all-conquering nation for "security" the King of Sardinia became a mere State-prisoner.

These events in the North naturally caused trepidation in the kingdom of Naples, and Ferdinand wisely secured the assistance of Austria. The news of the French defeat at the Nile, more especially the presence of the victor, caused the war party—of which Queen Maria Carolina and Lady Hamilton were the leaders—to forget that mere enthusiasm, although a valuable asset, was not the sole requisite in a campaign, especially when the enemy to be met was one so formidable as the victorious French. Naples was for up and doing, regardless of the consequences. She sowed the storm and reaped the whirlwind by reason of her undue haste in taking up arms before everything was ready for the conflict. There is perhaps some excuse for her Majesty's eagerness. Sister of the ill-fated Marie Antoinette, who had perished on the scaffold, and "truly a daughter of Maria Theresa,"<sup>1</sup> as Nelson averred, she wished to be avenged. Lady Hamilton on her part had become the confidential friend of Her Majesty and had rendered certain services to the Neapolitan and English Courts which she afterwards grossly exaggerated in an endeavour to secure a competence for herself. Nelson is not undeserving of censure for having forced the issue. He quoted Chatham's dictum, "The boldest measures are the safest," to Lady Hamilton, and told her that should "this miserable ruinous system of procrastination be persisted in, I would recommend that all your property and persons are ready to embark at a very short notice."

Nelson's instructions were to provide for the safety of the Sicilian kingdom, "the cutting off all communication between France and Egypt," and "the co-operating with the Turkish and Russian Squadrons which are to be sent into the Archipelago." In addition he was to blockade Malta. He delegated the last duty to Captain Ball, who, with four ships, was to cruise off the island

<sup>1</sup> Maria Theresa (1717-1780), Archduchess of Austria, Queen of Hungary and Bohemia, and Empress of Germany. She crossed swords with Frederick the Great on more than one occasion, and participated in the partition of Poland, 1772.

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in company with a Portuguese squadron under the Marquis de Niza. Of General Mack, who commanded the Neapolitan army, Nelson at first entertained a favourable opinion. With delightful *naïveté* he informed St Vincent, "I have endeavoured to impress the General with a favourable impression of me, and I think have succeeded. He is active and has an intelligent eye, and will do well, I have no doubt." But something more than these estimable qualities was necessary, as the total failure of the campaign was to prove.

Mack was then forty-six years of age, and had served under Field-Marshal Loudon, the most formidable soldier against whom Frederick the Great had fought. He was not a brilliant soldier, although he had acquitted himself with honour in the campaign of 1793. The son of a minor official, Mack had found it difficult to obtain promotion in a service dominated by the aristocracy, and he was certainly unpopular, which was not to his advantage in the field. He had accepted his present service in an army which he called "the finest in Europe," but which was scarcely more than a rabble, at the request of the Empress. Nelson, in a burst of enthusiasm, referred to it as "composed of 80,000 healthy good-looking troops," and "as far as my judgment goes in those matters, I agree, that a finer Army cannot be." The optimistic told themselves that Nelson had banished Napoleon and the finest warriors of France, which was correct, and prophesied that the scattered Republican army in Italy would be as completely overwhelmed as was the French fleet in Aboukir Bay. In this they were grievously mistaken. Instead of concentrating his forces and striking a decisive blow, the Austrian commander saw fit to divide them, with the result that although the Eternal City was occupied and Tuscany entered, the French succeeded in defeating three of the five columns. After a series of reverses, Mack retreated, Ferdinand fled, and Rome was retaken.

Nelson's part in this unfortunate undertaking was to convey some 5,000 troops to Leshorn and effect

a diversion in the rear of the enemy by taking possession of the aforementioned port. When this was done, and the cannon and baggage landed, Nelson returned to Naples. The story of the campaign, which ended in disaster and the creation of the Parthenopeian Republic<sup>1</sup> at Naples, does not concern us. Suffice it to say that in the last month of 1798 King Ferdinand and his Court concluded that they would be safer under Nelson's protection than in the Capital. They therefore embarked in the British fleet on the night of the 21st December, whence they were taken to Palermo. The circumstances and manner of the enforced retreat are described at length in the Admiral's despatch to the Earl of St Vincent, which runs as follows :—

" . . . For many days previous to the embarkation it was not difficult to foresee that such a thing might happen, I therefore sent for the *Goliath* from off Malta, and for Captain Troubridge in the *Culloden*, and his Squadron from the north and west Coast of Italy, the *Vanguard* being the only Ship in Naples Bay. On the 14th, the Marquis de Niza, with three of the Portuguese Squadron, arrived from Leghorn, as did Captain Hope in the *Alcmene* from Egypt : from this time, the danger for the personal safety of their Sicilian Majesties was daily increasing, and new treasons were found out, even to the Minister of War. The whole correspondence relative to this important business was carried on with the greatest address by Lady Hamilton and the Queen, who being constantly in the habits of correspondence, no one could suspect. It would have been highly imprudent in either Sir William Hamilton or myself to have gone to Court, as we knew that all our movements were watched, and even an idea by the Jacobins of arresting our persons as a hostage (as they foolishly imagined) against the attack of Naples, should the French get possession of it.

" Lady Hamilton, from this time to the 21st, every night received the jewels of the Royal Family, &c., &c.,

<sup>1</sup> Parthenopeia was the ancient name of Naples.

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and such clothes as might be necessary for the very large party to embark, to the amount, I am confident, of full two millions five hundred thousand pounds sterling. On the 18th, General Mack wrote that he had no prospect of stopping the progress of the French, and entreated their Majesties to think of retiring from Naples with their august Family as expeditiously as possible. All the Neapolitan Navy were now taken out of the Mole, consisting of three Sail of the Line and three Frigates: the seamen from the two Sail of the Line in the Bay left their Ships and went on shore: a party of English seamen with Officers were sent from the *Vanguard* to assist in navigating them to a place of safety. From the 18th, various plans were formed for the removal of the Royal Family from the palace to the water-side; on the 19th, I received a note from General Acton,<sup>1</sup> saying, that the King approved of my plan for their embarkation; this day, the 20th and 21st, very large assemblies of people were in commotion, and several people were killed, and one dragged by the legs to the palace. The mob by the 20th were very unruly, and insisted the Royal Family should not leave Naples; however, they were pacified by the King and Queen speaking to them.

“On the 21st, at half-past 8 P.M., three Barges with myself and Captain Hope, landed at a corner of the Arsenal. I went into the palace and brought out the whole Royal Family, put them into the Boats, and at half-past nine they were all safely on board the *Vanguard*, when I gave immediate notice to all British Merchants that their persons would be received on board every and any Ship in the Squadron, their effects of value being before embarked in the three English transports who were partly unloaded, and I had directed that all the condemned provisions should be thrown overboard, in order to make room for their effects. Sir William Hamilton had also directed two Vessels to be hired for the accommodation of the French

<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

emigrants,<sup>1</sup> and provisions were supplied from our Victuallers; in short, everything had been done for the comfort of all persons embarked.

"I did not forget in these important moments that it was my duty not to leave the chance of any Ships of War falling into the hands of the French, therefore, every preparation was made for burning them before I sailed; but the reasons given me by their Sicilian Majesties, induced me not to burn them till the last moment. I, therefore, directed the Marquis de Niza to remove all the Neapolitan Ships outside the Squadron under his command, and if it was possible, to equip some of them with jury masts and send them to Messina; and whenever the French advanced near Naples, or the people revolted against their legitimate Government, immediately to destroy the Ships of War, and to join me at Palermo, leaving one or two Ships to cruize between Capri and Ischia in order to prevent the entrance of any English Ship into the Bay of Naples. On the 23rd, at 7 P.M., the *Vanguard*, *Sannite*, and *Archimedes*, with about twenty sail of Vessels left the Bay of Naples; the next day it blew harder than I ever experienced since I have been at sea. Your Lordship will believe that my anxiety was not lessened by the great charge that was with me, but not a word of uneasiness escaped the lips of any of the Royal Family. On the 25th, at 9 A.M., Prince Albert, their Majesties' youngest child, having eat a hearty breakfast, was taken ill, and at 7 P.M. died in the arms of Lady Hamilton; and here it is my duty to tell your Lordship the obligations which the whole Royal Family as well as myself are under on this trying occasion to her Ladyship. . . . Lady Hamilton provided her own beds, linen, &c., and became *their slave*, for except one man, no person belonging to Royalty assisted the Royal Family, nor did her Ladyship enter a

<sup>1</sup> After the fall of the Bastille on the 14th July 1789, many of the French nobility left the country. In 1790, hereditary nobility was abolished by the National Assembly. *Émigrés* who had not returned to France by the 1st January 1792 were declared traitors.

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bed the whole time they were on board. Good Sir William also made every sacrifice for the comfort of the august Family embarked with him. I must not omit to state the kindness of Captain Hardy and every Officer in the *Vanguard*, all of whom readily gave their beds for the convenience of the numerous persons attending the Royal Family.

"At 8 P.M., being in sight of Palermo, his Sicilian Majesty's Royal Standard was hoisted at the main-top gallant-mast head of the *Vanguard*, which was kept flying there till his Majesty got into the *Vanguard's* barge, when it was struck in the Ship and hoisted in the Barge, and every proper honour paid to it from the Ship. As soon as his Majesty set his foot on shore, it was struck from the Barge. The *Vanguard* anchored at 2 A.M. of the 26th; at 5, I attended her Majesty and all the Princesses on shore; her Majesty being so much affected by the death of Prince Albert that she could not bear to go on shore in a public manner. At 9 A.M., his Majesty went on shore, and was received with the loudest acclamations and apparent joy."

Alas, that one has to admit that while Lady Hamilton was the "slave" of the Sicilian Royal Family, Nelson was rapidly becoming so infatuated that the same word might be used to describe his relationship with "our dear invaluable Lady Hamilton"! He also seems to have had an exaggerated sense of the importance of the princely personages who had placed themselves under his protection. In his letters he speaks of "The good and amiable Queen," "the great Queen," and so on. "I am here," he writes to Captain Ball, of the *Alexander*, dated Palermo, January 21st, 1799, "nor will the King or Queen allow me to move. I have offered to go to Naples, and have wished to go off Malta in case the Squadron from Brest should get near you, but neither one or the other can weigh with them." To Earl Spencer he confides on the 6th March, "In Calabria the people have cut down the Tree of Liberty; but I shall never consider any part of the Kingdom of Naples safe,



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or even Sicily, until I hear of the Emperor's entering Italy, when all my Ships shall go into the Bay of Naples, and I think we can make a Revolution against the French—at least, my endeavours shall not be wanting. I hope to go on the service myself, but I have my doubts if the King and Queen will consent to my leaving them for a moment." On the 20th of the same month he tells St Vincent very much the same thing. "If the Emperor moves, I hope yet to return the Royal Family to Naples. At present, I cannot move. Would the Court but let me, I should be better, I believe; for here I am writing from morn to eve: therefore you must excuse this jumble of a letter."

And after evening what? Rumour, not altogether devoid of fact, told strange tales of gambling continued far into the night, of money made and money lost, of an insidious enchantment which was beginning to sully the fair soul of Britain's greatest Admiral. How far the influence of Lady Hamilton led Nelson to neglect his duty is a debatable point. Admiral Mahan points out that on the 22nd October 1798, Nelson wrote to Lord St Vincent to the effect that he had given up his original plan, "which was to have gone to Egypt and attend to the destruction of the French shipping in that quarter," owing to the King's desire that he should return to Naples, after having arranged the blockade of Malta. This and similar expressions, says Mahan, "show the anxiety of his mind acting against his judgment." The late Judge O'Connor Morris, commenting on this phase of the Hero's career, is most emphatic in his condemnation. His connection with Emma Hamilton "kept him at Naples when he ought to have been elsewhere; it led him to disobey a superior's orders, on one occasion when there was no excuse; it perhaps prevented him from being present at the siege of Malta. It exposed him, too, to just censure at home, and gave pain and offence to his best friends; and the consciousness that he was acting wrongly soured, in some degree, his nature, and made him morose and at odds

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with faithful companions in arms." For the defence there are no more able advocates than Professor Sir J. Knox Laughton and Mr James R. Thursfield, M.A. Nelson, the former asserts, "in becoming the slave of a beautiful and voluptuous woman, did not cease to be a great commander. There is a common idea that his passions detained him at Naples to the neglect of his duty. This is erroneous. He made Naples his headquarters because he was ordered to do so, to provide for the safety of the kingdom and to take measures for the reduction of Malta." "The point to be observed and insisted on," Mr Thursfield says, "is that the whole of this pitiful tragedy belongs only to the last seven years of Nelson's life." He asks, "Why should the seven years of private lapse be allowed to overshadow the splendid devotion of a lifetime to public duty?" This authority does not deny that during the two years following the victory of the Nile Nelson's genius "suffered some eclipse," that his passion for Lady Hamilton was then "in its first transports, when he seemed tied to the Court of the Two Sicilies by other bonds than those of duty, when he annulled the capitulation at Naples and insisted on the trial and execution of Caracciolo,<sup>1</sup> and when he repeatedly disobeyed the orders of Lord Keith." He further points out that the period is the same "during which his mental balance was more or less disturbed by the wound he had received at the Nile, and his *amour-propre* was deeply and justly mortified by the deplorable blunder of the Admiralty in appointing Lord Keith to the chief command in succession to Lord St Vincent." At the time with which we are now dealing the latter disturbing element was not present, although he was considerably worried by the appointment of Captain Sir Sidney Smith as commander of a squadron in the Levant, "within the district which I had thought under my command." "The Knight forgets the respect due to his superior Officer": Nelson tells Lord St Vincent, "he has no orders from

<sup>1</sup> See *post*, pp. 131-8.

you to take my Ships away from my command; but it is all of a piece. Is it to be borne? Pray grant me your permission to retire, and I hope the *Vanguard* will be allowed to convey me and my friends, Sir William and Lady Hamilton, to England." Mr Thursfield makes no mention of this vexation, perhaps because the matter distressed the Admiral less than Lord Keith's appointment. On the other hand, Nelson's correspondence contains frequent reference to the gratuitous snub, which shows how deeply the iron had entered into his soul. "*I do feel, for I am a man*, that it is impossible for me to serve in these seas, with the Squadron under a junior Officer:—could I have thought it!—and from Earl Spencer!" is a typical instance. In the opinion of the same biographer, "the influence of Lady Hamilton, which ceased only with Nelson's life, cannot have been the sole cause, even if it was a contributory cause, of an attitude and temper of mind which lasted only while other causes were in operation and disappeared with their cessation. The evil spirit which beset him, whatever it may have been, had been exorcised for ever by the time that he entered the Sound.<sup>1</sup> . . . Yet the influence of Lady Hamilton was not less potent then and afterward than it was during the period of eclipse. There are no letters in the Morrison Collection more passionate than those which Nelson wrote to Lady Hamilton at this time, none which show more clearly that, as regards Lady Hamilton, and yet only in that relation, his mental balance was still more than infirm, his moral fibre utterly disorganized."

With this verdict the present writer is in complete accord. Nelson is to be censured for his moral breach and any neglect of duty which may be traceable to it, but to condemn him to infamy is to forget his subsequent career and to consign to the flames many other great figures of history.

See *post*, Chapters xiv. and xv

## CHAPTER XI

# The Neapolitan Rebels and their French Allies

(1799)

*"Speedy rewards and quick punishments are the foundation of good government."*

NELSON.

**I**N the middle of March 1799 Troubridge returned from the Levant, his command there having been given to Sir Sidney Smith. Vexatious as was the arrangement to both Nelson and Lord St Vincent, it had one point of importance in its favour—and was to have far-reaching results later—in that it enabled the Admiral to send the trusted captain with several vessels to blockade Naples. Troubridge was to "seize and get possession" of the islands of Procida, Ischia, and Capri, to use his influence with the inhabitants there and elsewhere, "in order to induce them to return to their allegiance to his Sicilian Majesty, and to take arms to liberate their Country from French tyranny and oppressive contributions." On the 8rd April, Troubridge was able to tell Nelson that "All the Ponza Islands have the Neapolitan flag flying. Your Lordship never beheld such loyalty; the people are perfectly mad with joy, and are asking for their beloved Monarch." That Nelson's hands were "full," as he wrote to his brother, is sufficiently evident. He had become "a Councillor and Secretary of State," to use his own words, and his public correspondence, "besides the business

of sixteen Sail of the Line, and all our commerce, is with Petersburg, Constantinople, the Consul at Smyrna, Egypt, the Turkish and Russian Admirals, Trieste, Vienna, Tuscany, Minorca, Earl St Vincent and Lord Spencer." Moreover, he was now Commander-in-Chief of the Neapolitan Navy, and had been promoted to Rear-Admiral of the Red. His health during this trying period was far from good. He complained to his friend the Duke of Clarence of being "seriously unwell," and he told Lord St Vincent, "I am almost blind and worn out, and cannot, in my present state, hold out much longer." He seemed to be growing more despondent daily, the good news of the success of the Austrian arms in Italy "does not even cheer me."

Victory no longer attended the French cause in the northern part of the peninsula, and the forces of the Republic were to evacuate it and to join the main French army. On the 7th May, Ferdinand's kingdom was relieved of its unwelcome visitors, save only the garrisons which were left at Capua and Caserta, and at the Castle of St Elmo. The internal condition of the State, however, was still far from settled. Commodore Caracciolo, representing the Jacobins, commanded a miniature fleet in Naples Bay; Cardinal Ruffo led a nondescript band called by the high-sounding title of "the Christian Army," against the Neapolitan republicans, who were in some force. The unhappy position of the Royal Family at this time is well described by the Queen in a letter to the Marquise d'Osmond, mother of the Comtesse de Boigne. It is from the Appendix to the first volume of the "Recollections" of the last-named that the extract is taken. The communication is dated from Palermo, the 2nd May 1799.

"We continue to live between hope and dread:" she says, "the news varies every day. We are expecting help from Russia: if it comes it will be of the greatest service to us. The English render us the greatest services. Were it not for them both Sicilies would be democratised, I should be dead of grief or drowned in

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the sea, or else, with my dear family, imprisoned in a castle by our rebellious subjects. You can read in the gazettes, without my naming them to you, how many ungrateful subjects we have. It suffices to tell you that in their writings and their ingratitude they have surpassed their foster-mother France, but with us the classes are different. Here it is the class which has the most to lose which is the most violent; nobles, bishops, monks, ordinary lawyers, but not the high magistracy, nor the people. The latter are loyal, and show it on every occasion. . . . My dear children have behaved like angels in all our unfortunate circumstances. They suffer every kind of privation they did not know before, without complaining, out of love for me, so that I may notice nothing. They are always good-humoured, though they have no amusements."

While Troubridge was clearing the way for the return of the royal exiles to Naples, Nelson received the startling intelligence that the Brest fleet of nineteen sail-of-the-line had not only escaped but had been seen off Oporto making for the Mediterranean. So far as it went, the news was correct enough, but the French ships numbered twenty-five instead of nineteen. Nelson's despondency and ill-health vanished; he lost not an instant in making his arrangements. Troubridge was recalled from Naples, and the "band of brothers" were ordered to join Rear-Admiral Duckworth off Port Mahon, Nelson's belief being that the first item on the French naval programme was the recovery of Minorca. Shortly afterwards he came to think that Sicily was the object of the enemy, whereupon he cancelled his former instructions and made the island of Maritimo the *rendez-vous*. This station he reached on the 28rd May with seven ships, which he hoped to bring up to sixteen, Duckworth having decided to wait for Lord St Vincent and not to reinforce Nelson. Ball, who had been ordered to abandon the blockade of Malta, had not arrived, and the delay filled the Admiral with anxiety. "I can only have two queries about him—

either that he has gone round to Messina, imagining that the French Fleet were close to him, or he is taken. Thus situated," he writes to Lord St Vincent, "I have only to remain on the north side of Maritimo, to keep covering Palermo, which shall be protected to the last, and to wait intelligence or orders for regulating my further proceedings.

"Your Lordship," he adds, "may depend that the Squadron under my command shall never fall into the hands of the Enemy; and before we are destroyed, I have little doubt but the Enemy will have their wings so completely clipped that they may be easily overtaken."

On the 28th May, Nelson heard from the Commander-in-chief that Bruix and the French fleet had been sighted off Cadiz on the 4th inst. by Keith's blockading squadron, the intention being to form a junction with the Spanish fleet. In reply to Lord St Vincent's despatch, Nelson was able to tell his senior officer that "we are completely on our guard," that he had determined to go to Palermo to get provisions and wine for six months, and to hold his vessels "in momentary readiness to act as you may order or the circumstances call for. My reason for remaining in Sicily is the covering the blockade of Naples, and the certainty of preserving Sicily in case of an attack, for if we were to withdraw our Ships, it would throw such a damp on the people that I am sure there would be no resistance. But from the favourable aspect of affairs in Italy, I am sure no attack will be made here, whilst the French know we have such a force to act against them. If Captain Ball has not entirely given up the blockade of Malta, and the poor Islanders have not given up to the French, I intend to continue the blockade . . . ; for as the danger from your happy arrival is not so great, I will run the risk of the Ships for a short time. The Russians will, I am told, be off there in a week or fortnight. In all this plan I am subject to your Lordship's more able judgment. I shall send a Frigate off Cape Corse, in case the French Fleet should come to be eastward of Corsica, and if I

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can find a small craft, one shall be on the west side of Sardinia, but the Bay of Naples draws me dry." Two days later, in writing to the same correspondent to announce the safe arrival of the *Vanguard* at Palermo, Nelson makes his usual acknowledgments of the services of those under his command: "I have our dear Troubridge for my assistant; in everything we are brothers. Hood and Hallowell are as active and kind as ever: not that I mean to say any are otherwise; but you know these are men of resources. Hardy was bred in the old school, and I can assure you, that I never have been better satisfied with the real good discipline of a Ship than the *Vanguard's*. I hope from my heart that you will meet the Dons alone: if the two Fleets join, I am ready, and with some of my Ships in as high order as ever went to sea."

As it happened, Keith was able to prevent the junction of the enemy's fleets. His position was between them—between "the devil and the deep sea," as he termed it. When the look-out frigates of the French fleet were sighted between Corsica and Genoa, orders were received from Lord St Vincent for Keith to return to Port Mahon, which the former thought might be the object of attack. Further despatches came to hand a little later, urging Keith to proceed to Minorca. The Commander-in-chief and Keith were really playing at cross-purposes, for while St Vincent was acting only on supposition, Keith was in touch with the enemy. It is probable in such a case that Nelson would have led his squadron into action, but Keith was not the type of man to risk acting on his own initiative to any great extent, and left the Frenchmen to proceed to Spezia.

On the 8th June, Nelson vacated the *Vanguard*, hoisted his flag on the *Foudroyant* (80), and was strengthened by the arrival of two ships from Lord St Vincent's fleet. He also heard of the impending resignation of the Commander-in-chief, his indifferent health making him "literally incapable of any service," as he afterwards wrote to Nelson. The unexpected news considerably



distressed the Admiral. He felt sincere admiration and regard for the gallant old sailor, who had served his King so long and so faithfully, sentiments recorded in a letter dated from Palermo, the 10th June 1790, as follows:—

“ We have a report that you are going home. This distresses us most exceedingly, and myself in particular ; so much so, that I have serious thoughts of returning, if that event should take place. But for the sake of our Country, do not quit us at this serious moment. I wish not to detract from the merit of whoever may be your successor ; but it must take a length of time, which I hope the war will not give, to be in any manner a St Vincent. We look up to you, as we have always found you, as to our Father, under whose fostering care we have been led to fame. If, my dear Lord, I have any weight in your friendship, let me entreat you to rouse the sleeping lion. Give not up a particle of your authority to any one ; be again our St Vincent, and we shall be happy. Your affectionate  
NELSON.”

To the Admiral's supreme disgust his own claims to the appointment were disregarded. Lord St Vincent's command was given to Lord Keith, who had the additional good fortune to find that the French fleet was in Vado Bay. Nelson, urged on by Ferdinand and perhaps by Lady Hamilton, was on his voyage to Naples with a body of troops to render assistance to the royalists, when two British sail-of-the-line hove in sight. One of them bore an important despatch from Keith, to the effect that not only was the enemy at sea but likely to be bound towards Nelson. The latter immediately returned to Palermo, disembarked the soldiers and their munitions, and cruised off Maritimo. Here he hoped to be joined by the *Alexander* and *Goliath*, which he had ordered to proceed from Malta some days before. Provided they arrived his force would be raised to eighteen battleships, including three Portuguese—four less than the enemy. “ I shall wait off Maritimo,” he says, in reply to Keith, “ anxiously expecting such a reinforcement as

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may enable me to go in search of the Enemy's fleet, when not one moment shall be lost in bringing them to battle ; for I consider the best defence for his Sicilian Majesty's Dominions, is to place myself alongside the French." No further ships arrived, and Nelson therefore returned to Palermo. Keith's neglect aroused Nelson's wrath to such an extent, that while he was at sea he sent a copy of the above letter to the Earl of St Vincent, complaining that the Commander-in-chief had not sent him "a force fit to face the Enemy: but, as we are, I shall not get out of their way ; although, as I am, I cannot think myself justified in exposing the world (I may almost say), to be plundered by these miscreants. I trust your Lordship will not think me wrong in the painful determination I conceived myself forced to make, for agonized indeed was the mind of your Lordship's faithful and affectionate servant."

Mahan remarks that Nelson's station off Maritimo was strategically sound, enabling him to intercept the approach of the enemy "to either Naples or Sicily," and it was while he was cruising here that he received a despatch from his former Commander-in-chief to the effect that Keith was searching for the French, and that reinforcements were making their way to Port Mahon. Nelson was convinced that the enemy was steering for Naples. After a brief visit to the King at Palermo and receiving Sir William and Lady Hamilton on board the *Foudroyant*, he sailed for the capital.

On Troubridge's withdrawal from Naples, the blockade had been placed in the hands of Captain Foote of the *Seahorse*, a frigate of thirty-eight guns, who concerted with Ruffo and his Russian and Turkish allies to rid the city of the insurgents. Fort St Elmo, garrisoned by the few remaining French, and the castles of Uovo and Nuovo, held by the rebels, alone held out. The Cardinal arranged an armistice with the insurgents, and although there was further trouble, the matter was patched up and negotiations were again begun. Subsequently a capitulation was signed on the 23rd June.

Nelson received the news before his squadron anchored in the Bay of Naples on the following day, and, not knowing the exact terms on which it had been granted, characterised them as "infamous."

The main conditions were that the forts Nuovo and Uovo should be delivered up with their effects; that the troops should keep possession of the places until the ships which were to be provided for those who wished to proceed to Toulon were ready to sail; that the garrisons should march out with the honours of war; that "Persons and Property, both movable and immovable, of every individual of the two Garrisons, shall be respected and guaranteed," a clause applicable also to prisoners which the allies had made during the blockade of the forts; and that "All the other hostages and State prisoners, confined in the two Forts, shall be set at liberty, immediately after the present Capitulation is signed." Nelson at once ordered Foote to haul down the flag of truce flying from the *Seahorse*. Sufficient of his story has been told to show that the Admiral had little or no pity for rebels. So far back as the 6th June, he had written to Foote that the intelligence sent to him by that officer of the hanging of thirteen Jacobins "gave us great pleasure," and he also expressed the hope that three priests who had been condemned would "dangle on the tree best adapted to their weight of sins." Without further ado he sent a declaration to "the Rebellious Subjects" in the two forts that "They must surrender themselves to His Majesty's Royal mercy," and addressed a summons to the Commanding Officer of the French at the Castle of St Elmo, that he must either accede to the terms made by Ruffo and the Russian Commander, or "take the consequences, as I shall not agree to any other." A paper signed by Nelson and explained to Ruffo, but rejected by him, announced that "the British Admiral proposes to the Cardinal to send, in their joint names, to the French and Rebels, that the arrival of the British fleet has completely destroyed the compact, as would that of the French if they had had

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the power (which, thank God, they have not) to come to Naples. . . . That as to Rebels and Traitors, no power on earth has a right to stand between their gracious King and them : they must instantly throw themselves on the clemency of their Sovereign, for no other terms will be allowed them ; nor will the French be allowed even to name them in any capitulation. If these terms are not complied with, in the time . . . viz., two hours for the French, and instant submission on the part of the Rebels—such very favourable conditions will never be again offered.”

Nelson knew the man with whom he was dealing, and as the following characteristic letter to Rear-Admiral Duckworth shows, he was quite prepared for any eventuality. With insurgents on land and the possibility of a French fleet at sea in the near vicinity, it was incumbent on the British Admiral not to run unnecessary risks :—

“As you will believe, the Cardinal and myself have begun our career by a complete difference of opinion. He will send the Rebels to Toulon,—I say they shall not go. He thinks one house in Naples more to be prized than his Sovereign’s honour. Troubridge and Ball are gone to the Cardinal, for him to read my declaration to the French and Rebels, whom he persists in calling patriots—what a prostitution of the word ! I shall send Foote to get the Gun-boats from Procida. I wish the Fleet not to be more than two-thirds of a cable from each other. I shall send you a sketch of the anchorage, in forty fathom water. The *Foudroyant* to be the Van-ship. If the French fleet should favour us with a visit, I can easily take my station in the centre.”

The Cardinal positively refused to entertain Nelson’s opinions, but after some hesitation decided to discuss affairs with him on the *Foudroyant*. The interview, which was stormy on both sides and somewhat protracted, owing to the necessity of employing Lord and Lady Hamilton as interpreters, took place on the afternoon of the 25th. Both of them held steadfastly to his own

point of view. Nelson therefore wrote that "in his opinion" the Treaty with the rebels "cannot be carried into execution, without the approbation of his Sicilian Majesty."

Uovo and Nuovo were taken possession of by British seamen under Troubridge on the evening of the 26th inst., and on the following day, Nelson communicated the fact to the Admiralty, adding: "This morning I am going to send a detachment under Captain Troubridge, to cut down the dangerous Tree of Anarchy, and to burn it before the King's palace. The moment I can find the City a little quieted, guns shall be got against St Elmo, when, I am sure, the French will be glad to surrender. . . . In my present position, I have not the smallest alarm should the Enemy favour us with a visit, inferior as my force is to oppose them." The castle capitulated on the 12th July 1799, to Nelson's "brave friend" Troubridge, whose "great character," "ability and resources" were duly detailed to Lord Keith, while the Admiral told Earl Spencer that, "On land the captain of the *Culloden* is a first-rate general!" Troubridge's reward was a baronetcy, to which no one ever had a clearer title.

Was Nelson justified in cancelling the agreement entered into by Ruffo and his allies and the enemy? The question has been discussed with great vehemence and at prodigious length. Mahan's opinion is that "his conduct throughout was open and consistent." He is convinced that the Admiral acted up to his firm belief "that he not only had a right to suspend the Capitulation, because, though signed, it had not been executed, but that it was his bounden duty so to do; having both legal power and adequate force to prevent its execution." Nelson "regarded himself as, and for the time being actually was, the representative of the King of the Two Sicilies, as well as the admiral of the British fleet. As representative, he was charged with the interests and honour of the Sovereign and had authority over all Neapolitan officials; as admiral, he wielded power to

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enforce obedience, if refused. Considering the terms of the Capitulation to be contrary to the interests and the honour of the Kingdom, he was under an obligation to prevent their going into effect, until the King's decision, becoming known, should supersede his own discretion."

Laughton, whose biography of Nelson is much shorter than Mahan's, and is therefore not so comprehensive, dismisses the matter by saying, "it is perfectly well established as the usage of civilised war that terms granted by a military officer are conditional on the approval of his superiors, unless he has distinct authority to negotiate, or the capitulation has been effected wholly or in part. In the present instance Cardinal Ruffo had not only no authority to negotiate, but he had express orders from the King not to do so." By the fourth Article of the "Instructions to the troops of his Majesty, ordered to repair to the Bay of Naples," dated Palermo, June 10th, 1799, "All the military and political operations shall be agreed upon by the Prince Royal and Admiral Lord Nelson. The opinion of this latter always to have a preponderance, on account of the respect due to his experience, as well as to the forces under his command, which will determine the operations; and also because we are so deeply indebted to him for the zeal and attachment of which he has given so many proofs." By the tenth Article, "The acts of clemency concerning the noted offenders, and the pardoning of the same, are reserved for the King, excepting those stipulated in the articles of capitulation."

About seventy Jacobins were executed for their misdeeds, but Nelson was only concerned in the death of one of them. Commodore Francesco Caracciolo, the commander of the Republican Navy, had previously accompanied the Sicilian Court to Palermo, but when an edict was issued by the French that the property of all absentees would be confiscated, he had obtained King Ferdinand's permission to return. Marshal Macdonald, then Commander-in-chief of the French Army of Naples, refers to the matter in his "Recollections." "I had

resolved," he writes, "to induce Admiral Caracciolo to take service in the new fleet; he equipped a flotilla which secured respect for the port and coasts of Naples, frequently threatened by attempts of the English, who occupied the islands and were stationed in the roads."<sup>1</sup> When Caracciolo's position on sea became untenable, he sought a safer asylum in one of the forts, whence he eventually fled to the mountains disguised as a peasant. Here he was discovered and captured. The refugee was brought on board the *Foudroyant* on the morning of the 29th June. Nelson at once instructed Count Thurn, Commander of the Sicilian frigate *La Minerva*, who had been in action with Caracciolo, to assemble five of the senior officers under his command to inquire if the prisoner were guilty of rebellion against his lawful Sovereign, and having fired at his Sicilian Majesty's colours on board *La Minerva*. The trial duly took place; the sentence was death. This was to be carried out "by hanging him at the fore yard-arm of His Sicilian Majesty's Frigate *La Minerva*, under your command, at five o'clock this evening; and to cause him to hang there until sunset, when you will have his body cut down, and thrown into the sea." Such were Nelson's instructions, which were obeyed. Parsons, who had charge of Caracciolo, describes him as "a short, thick-set man, of apparent strength, but haggard with misery and want; his clothing in wretched condition, but his countenance denoting stern resolution to endure that misery like a man." The sympathetic narrator persists in calling him "veteran" and "old man." The Commodore was only forty-seven years of age, although his wan appearance may have made him look considerably older. "At two o'clock in the afternoon," Parsons adds, "the veteran, with a firm step, walked into Lord Nelson's barge, and with a party of thirty of our seamen, under one of our lieutenants, was taken to his [Count Thurn's] flagship, the gun fired, and the brave old man launched

<sup>1</sup> This additional corroborative evidence has not been noticed by many of Nelson's recent biographers.

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into eternity at the expiration of the two hours from the time the sentence had passed. The seamen of our fleet, who clustered on the rigging like bees, consoled themselves that it was only an Italian prince, and the admiral of Naples, that was hanging—a person of very light estimation compared with the lowest man in a British ship. His Majesty of Naples, the Prime Minister, Sir John Acton, and many of the foreign ambassadors, joined and took up their quarters in the *Foudroyant* two days after the execution; and my Lord Nelson removed to the first lieutenant's cabin as his sleeping apartment, giving his cabin to the king's use, and the larboard side of the maindeck for his cooks, who condescended to officiate as ours; and never did midshipmen fare so sumptuously as during the king's long stay on board the *Foudroyant*. The day was passed in administering justice (Italian fashion) to the wretches who fell into the grasp of Cardinal Ruffo's lambs, enlivened by the bombardment of St Elmo, which we were battering in breach. At noon, dinner was served to the royal party and their guests on the quarter-deck; Lady Hamilton's graceful form bending over her harp, and her heavenly music gave a gusto to the dessert. As the sun went down, the opera singers, in a large, decked galley, came alongside, and all that could delight the ear or please the eye was there to fascinate and charm."

There is more than a suspicion of irony in the above passage. It is useful because one can readily believe that it was the point of view of the majority of the British petty officers and seamen. They failed to understand why so much deference should be shown to King Ferdinand and his Queen, who doubtless in their opinion would have shown more royal qualifications had they remained in their capital instead of making a hasty flight to Palermo. This is not the place to discuss the merits and demerits of monarchy and republic, both of which have their advantages. Certainly the foreign policy of Great Britain at the end of the eighteenth



century did not allow an ally to be dethroned without making an effort on his behalf.

Southey, when dealing with the execution of Caracciolo, has seen fit to introduce Nelson's relations with Lady Hamilton into the matter, which may be forgiven a man who published his narrative in 1818, when current scandal and gossip were often the chief "authorities" of the historian. "Doubtless" he remarks, "the British Admiral seemed to himself to be acting under a rigid sense of justice, but to all other persons it was obvious that he was influenced by an infatuated attachment—a baneful passion, which destroyed his domestic happiness, and now, in a second instance, stained inelastically his public character." Now Lady Hamilton, as a matter of actual fact, had nothing whatever to do with the hanging of the traitor and did not converse with the Admiral during Caracciolo's detention. The rebel was tried by those of his own nationality, and according to Mahan, "there is no ground for doubting that he (Nelson) had authority to order a court-martial, and to carry its sentence into execution, nor that Caracciolo came within the jurisdiction of a court-martial properly constituted." It is only just to add, however, that in the opinion of the same eminent authority there was no real necessity for such undue haste on Nelson's part. "He should have remembered that the act would appear to the world, not as that of the Neapolitan plenipotentiary, but of the British officer, and that his nation, while liable like others to bursts of unreasoning savagery, in its normal moods delights to see justice clothed in orderly forms, unstained by precipitation or suspicion of perversion, advancing to its ends with the majesty of law, without unseemly haste, providing things honest in the sight of all men. That he did not do so, when he could have done so, has been intuitively felt; and to the instinctive resentment thus aroused among his countrymen has been due the facility with which the worst has been too easily believed."

## CHAPTER XII

### Nelson in Temporary Command

(1790-1800)

*"The great object of the war is—Down, down with the French."*  
NELSON.

KING FERDINAND was again on board the *Foudroyant*, holding his Levées on the quarter-deck, and making himself as affable as was possible to a man of his morose temperament. Nelson's infatuation for the welfare of his Majesty and his kingdom seemed growing. The castle of St Elmo had fallen, thereby completing the conquest of Naples, but the Admiral saw fit to order Troubridge to march against Capua, thereby denuding the fleet of a thousand men, who were to act in concert with four times that number of troops. This was done after the receipt of a warning from Keith that it might be necessary to withdraw the squadron for the protection of Minorca.

"Should such an order come at this moment," Nelson writes to Earl Spencer, "it would be a cause for some consideration whether Minorca is to be risked, or the two Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily? I rather think my decision would be to risk the former." In other words, Nelson placed the interests of an allied Power before those of his own country, although of course his services to the Sicilies were of importance to the latter. One cannot help thinking that there is more than a suspicion of ulterior motives in what was to lead to a flagrant disobedience of orders. The letter concludes with the most affectionate references to Sir William and

Lady Hamilton, who were assuredly his evil geni at the moment. According to Nelson they were with him to his "great comfort," without them "it would have been impossible I could have rendered half the service to his Majesty which I have now done: their heads and their hearts are equally great and good." Writing to Keith on the same day—18th July 1799—he refers solely to King Ferdinand: "It has been and is my study to treat his Majesty with all the respect due to so great a personage, and I have the pleasure to believe that my humble endeavours have met with the Royal approbation."

After penning this communication the Admiral received a despatch from Keith, dated the 27th June, implicitly requiring him "to send such Ships as you can possibly spare off the Island of Minorca to wait my orders." This he acknowledged by saying that "as soon as the safety of His Sicilian Majesty's Kingdoms is secured, I shall not lose one moment in making the detachment you are pleased to order. At present, under God's Providence, the safety of His Sicilian Majesty, and his speedy restoration to his Kingdom, depends on this Fleet, and the confidence inspired even by the appearance of our Ships before the City is beyond all belief; and I have no scruple in declaring my opinion that should any event draw us from the Kingdom, that if the French remain in any part of it, disturbances will again arise, for all order having been completely overturned, it must take a thorough cleansing, and some little time, to restore tranquillity." In order to justify his conduct, Nelson next sent a second note to Earl Spencer. After referring to his previous letter, which showed that he was prepared for Keith's order, he adds, "more than ever is my mind made up, that, at this moment, I will not part with a single Ship, as I cannot do that without drawing a hundred and twenty men from each Ship now at the Siege of Capua, where an Army is gone this day. I am fully aware of the act I have committed; but, sensible of my loyal intentions, I am prepared for any fate which

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may await my disobedience. Capua and Gaeta will soon fall; and the moment the scoundrels of French are out of this Kingdom, I shall send eight or nine Ships of the Line to Minorca. I have done what I thought right; others may think differently; but it will be my consolation that I have gained a Kingdom, seated a faithful Ally of his Majesty firmly on his throne, and restored happiness to millions. Do not think, my dear Lord, that my opinion is formed from the arrangements of any one. *No*; be it good, or be it bad, it is all my own." The writer concludes with an appeal for Earl Spencer's interest with the Board of the Admiralty, which was not vouchsafed. His having proceeded to the Bay of Naples and of the operations against the castle of St Elmo were approved, but not of the land warfare carried on by the seamen against Capua. Their Lordships did not see "sufficient reason to justify your having disobeyed the orders you had received from your Commanding-Officer, or having left Minorca exposed to the risk of being attacked, without having any Naval force to protect it."

On the 19th July, Nelson was handed a second urgent despatch from Keith, ordering him either to leave Sicily and repair to Minorca with his whole force or to detach the greater part of his squadron and place it under Duckworth. Keith's "repeated information" led him to believe that the enemy was not making for Sicily or Egypt, as had been thought probable, but for Ireland. Nelson again refused to obey his Commander-in-chief. Not until the 22nd inst., when Keith informed Nelson that the French fleet was off Cape Tres Forcas, did he see fit to dispatch Duckworth with four vessels to Minorca.

The Frenchmen succeeded in joining their Spanish allies at Cartagena and arriving safely at Brest, from which port they did not issue for some months, an event which does not therefore concern us at the moment. Capua and Gaeta eventually surrendered, the articles of capitulation being signed by Acton and

Nelson on behalf of King Ferdinand on the 31st July 1799, thus liberating "the Kingdom of Naples from a band of robbers," as the Admiral informed Keith.

So far this portion of the narrative has been necessarily confined to cold, matter-of-fact details. Mention must now be made of the celebrations held on the first anniversary of the battle of the Nile. Well might Nelson be fêted on such an occasion; he had served their Sicilian Majesties all too faithfully. He thus describes the picturesque scene for the benefit of his wife:—

"Thank God all goes well in Italy, and the Kingdom of Naples is liberated from thieves and murderers. But still, it has so overthrown the fabric of a regular Government, that much time and great care are necessary to keep the Country quiet. The 1st of August was celebrated here with as much respect as our situation would admit. The King dined with me; and, when His Majesty drank my health, a Royal salute of twenty-one guns was fired from all his Sicilian Majesty's Ships of War, and from all the Castles. In the evening there was a general illumination. Amongst other representations, a large Vessel was fitted out like a Roman galley; on its oars were fixed lamps, and in the centre was erected a rostral column with my name: at the stern were elevated two angels supporting my picture. In short, my dear Fanny, the beauty of the whole is beyond my powers of description. More than 2000 variegated lamps were suspended round the Vessel. An orchestra was fitted up, and filled with the very best musicians and singers. The piece of music was in a great measure to celebrate my praise, describing their previous distress, 'but Nelson came, the invincible Nelson, and they were preserved, and again made happy.' This must not make you think me vain; no, far, very far from it, I relate it more from gratitude than vanity. I return to Palermo with the King to-morrow."<sup>1</sup>

It was characteristic of Nelson's fond regard for his father that when King Ferdinand created him Duke of

<sup>1</sup> The squadron in Naples Bay was placed under Troubridge.

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Bronté, which he believed would mean an increase of some £3000 a year to his income, he taxed the estate to the extent of £500 per annum on behalf of the Rev. Edmund Nelson as "a mark of gratitude to the best of parents."

Keith being on the look-out for the forty ships of the allied fleets—for Bruix had been joined by the Spanish fleet at Cartagena as previously mentioned—the chief command devolved upon Nelson. Unfortunately Keith was unable to come up with the enemy, who entered Brest without being brought to battle. He then returned to England. Nelson hoped that the Lords of the Admiralty would make his temporary command permanent. Why they failed to do so is not quite clear. Keith was sent back, and resumed command in the following January. The situation was a most difficult one for Nelson, especially as the King of the Two Sicilies invariably showed the white feather when Nelson wished to conduct him to Naples: "nothing can move him." The Admiral's health was still unsatisfactory. "I am almost blind, and truly very unwell." He was worried because the naval force had been withdrawn from the coast of Italy, worried about the siege of Malta, and worried by the stupidity of his Russian and Turkish allies. But he maintained a bold front, and never let the respective commanders know what he thought of them. Instead, he wrote the most reassuring messages to everybody, knowing and appreciating full well the value of optimism.

In September 1799, we find his squadron disposed at six different points, namely off Alexandria and the coast of Egypt, under Sir Sidney Smith; off Malta, under the Portuguese Rear-Admiral the Marquis de Niza; at Palermo; on the coast of Naples and the Roman coast, under Troubridge; on the north coast of Italy; and blockading Cadiz and protecting the Straits of Gibraltar, Minorca, etc., which is sufficient to show that his task was an arduous one. He endeavoured to stir up enthusiasm in the land forces on behalf of Malta,

Civita Vecchia, and Rome. To Sir James Erskine, at Port Mahon, he wrote with all the eloquence he could command to incite him to effort : " The field of glory is a large one, and was never more open to any one than at this moment to you. Rome would throw open her gates and receive you as a deliverer ; and the Pope<sup>1</sup> would owe his restoration to the Papal Chair to an *heretic*. This is the first great object, as it would not only be the complete deliverance of Italy, but restore peace and tranquillity to the torn-to-pieces Kingdom of Naples. . . . The next great object is the reduction of Malta, and in any other moment than the present, it would be a most important one. . . . To return to the first object, I can take upon me to say, that our King would be much gratified that *Britain* not *Austria* should re-instate the Pope. You are at perfect liberty to say this from me ; for the world sees the ambition of Austria, and her eagle wants to extend her wings from the Adriatic to the Mediterranean. I will not say more, but that I will support you to the utmost of my abilities." Succour did not come from Erskine but from a division of troops sent by the veteran Russian commander Suwarrow, and, on the 1st October, Nelson was able to inform the Admiralty of the terms entered into with the French by Troubridge for the evacuation of Rome and Civita Vecchia, " on which event I sincerely congratulate their Lordships."

On the 15th of the same month Nelson sent the " Sketch of my Life," already remarked upon,<sup>2</sup> to Mr John McArthur of the " Naval Chronicle," in which he says that when the terms of capitulation were signed on board the *Culloden*, " a prophecy, made to me on my arrival at Naples, was fulfilled, viz., ' that I should take Rome with my Ships.' "

" Thus," he concludes, " may be exemplified by my Life that perseverance in my profession will most probably meet its reward. Without having any inheritance, or being fortunate in prize money, I have received

<sup>1</sup> Pius VI.

<sup>2</sup> See *ante*, p. 24.

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all the honours of my profession, been created a Peer of Great Britain, and I may say to thee, reader :

“ ‘ *Go thou and do likewise.* ’ ”

Nelson's enthusiasm in the matter of Italy was due partly to the magnificent series of victories which the armies of the coalition had won. Alessandria and Mantua had fallen, Moreau had retreated near Novi, and Tortona had surrendered. So far everything seemed to be pitched in a major key, but the minor element entered when the Russians were sent into Switzerland instead of being allowed to finish their task in Italy. Masséna won the battle of Zurich, thereby severing the communications between the Austro-Russian forces in Switzerland and in Italy. In October the intrepid Suwarrow, crossing the Alps, withdrew his forces to Bavaria for the purpose of taking up winter quarters, declining to further expose his worn-out troops.

In the same month another and more important event happened, which was to be far-reaching in its results. On the 9th of that month Napoleon, having been fortunate enough to escape the vigilance of British cruisers during his long and tedious voyage from Alexandria, landed in France. Nelson did not hear the news until the 24th, when he told Sir Sidney Smith, “ I have just got a report that appears to have some foundation, that Buonaparte has passed Corsica in a Bombard, steering for France. No Crusader ever returned with more humility—contrast his going in *L'Orient*, &c., &c.” Nelson was not on intimate terms with Smith, and was therefore not likely to relieve his mind “ against French villany ” as he did to Earl Spencer : “ The great object of the war is—*Down, down with the French !* ” “ If I could have any Cruisers,” he said in another letter, “ as was my plan, off Cape Bon, in Africa, and between Corsica and Toulon, Mr Buonaparte could not probably have got to France ; but if it bring on a confusion at Paris, I hope it will be for the best.” “ I have regretted sincerely the escape of Buonaparte ” ; he tells the Earl of



Elgin, British ambassador at Constantinople; "but those Ships which were destined by me for the two places where he would certainly have been intercepted, were, from the Admiralty thinking, doubtless, that the Russians would do something at sea, obliged to be at Malta, and other services which I thought the Russian Admiral would have assisted me in—therefore, no blame lays at my door." Again, "Our news here is of a civil war in France—Buonaparte against Barras. May God increase their confusion."

While Sir Sidney Smith had been eminently successful at the siege of Acre, which made Napoleon miss his "destiny" and precluded him from changing "the face of the world," as he himself stated, the defeat of the Turks after their disembarkation at Aboukir in July considerably altered the condition of affairs. Smith and the Turkish Government were for allowing the French to return to their native country, an arrangement not at all in accord with Nelson's wishes. "I own my hope yet is," he confesses to the Earl of Elgin, "that the Sublime Porte will never permit a single Frenchman to quit Egypt; and I own myself wicked enough to wish them all to die in that Country they chose to invade. We have scoundrels of French enough in Europe without them. . . . I again take the liberty of repeating that it is contrary to my opinion, allowing a single Frenchman from Egypt to return during the war to France. It would [be a] paper I never would subscribe to; but I submit to the better judgment of men." To Spencer Smith, Secretary of Embassy, Constantinople, he says much the same thing: "I cannot bring myself to believe they would entirely quit Egypt; and, if they would, I never would consent to one of them returning to the Continent of Europe during the war. I wish them to *perish* in Egypt, and give a great lesson to the world of the justice of the ALMIGHTY." "I would have kept up a more constant communication with Egypt; "he tells Keith on the 7th January 1800, "but I have never had the benefit of small Vessels." When the Admiral

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heard of the Convention of El Arish, concluded by Smith and Kléber—Napoleon's successor in Egypt—Nelson was furious. By its terms the army and its munitions were to be allowed to return to France. Had Nelson been Commander-in-chief, he would have refused "to ratify any consent or approbation of Sir Sidney Smith," and would never "for a moment have forgot my text—that at all risks of giving offence, *not one Frenchman should be allowed to quit Egypt.*" Keith showed a firm hand when the intelligence reached him. He would consent to "no Capitulation with the French Army in Egypt, except as prisoners of war," and he insisted on the abandoning of all ships and munitions. Moreover, no troops were to return until they were exchanged. In due course the British Government consented to the terms which had been made, although it disapproved of Sir Sidney Smith's high-handed policy. On Kléber being informed of the conditions imposed on him by Keith, he refused to entertain them. Hostilities were renewed before the receipt of the Order from England confirming the capitulation, and the negotiations came to nothing.

## CHAPTER XIII

### Disobedience to Orders

*' Pray God we may get alongside of them, the event I leave to Providence "*  
NELSON.

MALTA was in a pitiful, half-starved condition. Nelson urged Sir James Erskine at Mahon, and Brigadier-General Graham at Messina, to send troops to its relief. They were as adamant and refused. He was therefore kept "in desperation about Malta" until General Fox arrived at Minorca and released the garrison there for the more urgent necessities of the unhappy island. The Russians upon whom the Admiral had also depended were sent elsewhere in pursuance of the Czar's plan to withdraw from the enfeebled coalition.

The Portuguese having withdrawn their ships from the blockade, it was eminently necessary to fill their place, especially as it was understood that a French squadron was likely to be sent to the relief of the beleaguered. Keith was back at his post in January 1800, and was off Leghorn with Nelson on the 20th of that month. After proceeding to Palermo they both went to Malta, where the exciting news was received that the enemy had not only left port but had been seen off the west end of Sicily.

The Commander-in-chief remained at Malta ready to give the Frenchmen a warm welcome should they come his way; Nelson was dispatched to capture the Republican squadron. This consisted of the famous *Genéreau*, the 74-gun ship, which had escaped after the battle of the Nile, three corvettes, and an armed store-

ship. The Admiral had three sail-of-the-line at his service, when he came up with Rear-Admiral Perrée on the 18th February 1800, but the chase had already been started by the *Alexander*, which happened to be cruising near. The French store-ship struck her tri-coloured ensign after a few shots had been fired, and was promptly secured. The *Généreux* was then raked with several broadsides by the *Success* frigate, a compliment returned by the Frenchman to the disadvantage of the British crew, of which one man was killed and the Master and seven men wounded. When the *Foudroyant* and the *Northumberland* approached, and began to fight in real earnest, the enemy's flagship fired her broadside and surrendered. The corvettes made good their escape. Perrée died of his wounds on the following day. His flag was sent by the Admiral to Leopold, Prince of Salerno, through Sir John Acton, who described King Ferdinand's son as being "in raptures" at the present.

On the 24th, the blockade of Malta was entrusted to Nelson by Keith, the Commander-in-chief sailing for Genoa to assist the Austrians in the siege of that place, which eventually fell in the first week of the following June. The position was an ignominious one from Nelson's point of view, as his letters testify. He told his superior that "Without some rest, I am gone," and that he was "absolutely exhausted." In referring to Keith in a note to Lord Minto he underlines "*my Commander-in-chief*," for a reason which is fairly obvious. "Ought I to trust Dame Fortune any more?" he asks, "her daughter may wish to step in and tear the mother from me. I have in truth serious thoughts of giving up active service—Greenwich Hospital seems a fit retreat for me after being *evidently* thought unfit to command in the Mediterranean. "*We of the Nile* are not equal to Lord Keith in his (Acton's) estimation, and ought to think it an honour to serve under such a *clever* man," he tells Troubridge. "I can say little good of myself: I am far from well"; "My state of health is

very precarious. Two days ago I dropped with a pain in my heart, and I am always in a fever"; "my very ill state of health"; "I believe I am almost finished," are passages to be found in his correspondence at this period. He informed Keith that his health was "so very indifferent," that he was obliged "in justice to myself, to retire to Palermo for a few weeks, and to direct Troubridge to carry on the service during my necessary absence. I shall quit this station when matters are all put in a right way."

Troubridge heard of Nelson's decision with unfeigned sorrow. "I beseech you," he says in a note of such sincere regard and affection that it is worthy of place in any "Life of Nelson," "hear the entreaties of a sincere friend, and do not go to Sicily for the present."

Nelson paid no heed to the warning, and proceeded to Palermo. While returning to Malta the *Foudroyant* was able to render assistance to the *Penelope* (86) frigate, which was following the *Guillaume Tell* (86) in much the same way as a sturdy little terrier sometimes follows a much larger dog. After some hours the *Lion* (64) came up, followed by the *Foudroyant*. The *Guillaume Tell*—the sole remaining sail-of-the-line which had escaped at the Nile—was endeavouring to break the blockade of Valetta, but the time had come for her last fight with the undaunted foe. She surrendered after a splendid resistance on Sunday morning, the 30th March, and was towed in a very crippled and dismasted state to Syracuse. In due course she was refitted and rendered good service in the British navy as the *Malta*. Rear-Admiral Decrès was wounded and taken prisoner, and some 200 of the 1220 men on his flagship were either killed or rendered *hors de combat*.

Sir Edward Berry, who commanded the *Foudroyant*, wrote a hasty letter giving Nelson a few particulars. "I had but one wish this morning—it was for you," is the opening sentence, "How we prayed for you, God knows, and your sincere and faithful friend," are the concluding words. Could better evidence be produced

of the love which animated Nelson and his "band of brothers"? "My task is done, my health is lost, and the orders of the great Earl of St Vincent are completely fulfilled—thanks, ten thousand thanks, to my brave friends!" Thus he wrote to Berry on the 5th April 1800, and on the following day he made similar remarks to Lord Minto: "Our dear great Earl of St Vincent's orders to me were to follow the French Mediterranean fleet, and to annihilate them: it has been done, thanks to the zeal and bravery of my gallant friends! My task is done, my health lost, and I have wrote to Lord Keith for my retreat. May all orders be as punctually obeyed, but never again an Officer at the close, of what I must, without being thought vain, (for such I am represented by my enemies,) call a glorious career, be so treated! I go with our dear friends Sir William and Lady Hamilton; but whether by water or land depends on the will of Lord Keith.' Again and again Nelson refers to the prowess of his comrades in arms. "The happy capture of the *William Tell*," he writes to the Capitan Pacha, "is the finish to the whole French fleet, which my Royal Master desired me to destroy. Having, by the bravery of the Officers and Men under my command, accomplished my task, I am going to England for the benefit of my health; but I can assure you, and beg of your Excellency to assure the Grand Signior of the same, that should the Enemy again send a Naval force to attack his Dominions, I shall hold myself ready to come forth again for their destruction." To the Caimakan Pacha he says, "It was my orders, in May 1798, to destroy the French Mediterranean fleet. By the happy capture of the *Généreux* and *William Tell*, (the last on the 30th March,) thanks to the Almighty, and the bravery of the Officers and Men under my command, *all, all*, are taken, burnt, or sunk. Of the thirteen Sail of the Line, not one remains; and I trust that very soon the same may be told of their Army, who dared to land on the Territory of the Sublime Porte. Perish all the enemies of his Imperial Majesty the Grand Signior!

Having completely obeyed my orders, with great injury to my health, I am going to England for the benefit of it." He adds that he will not fail his ally, should another French fleet menace the Turkish dominions. "I shall hold myself ready, if I am thought fit for such a service, to come forth, and be the instrument of God's vengeance on such miscreant infernal scoundrels." He writes to Earl Spencer, enclosing Berry's account of the capture of the French battleship, and assures himself that his Lordship "will not be sparing of promotion to the deserving. My friends wished me to be present. I have no such wish; for a something might have been given me, which now cannot. Not for all the world would I rob any man of a sprig of laurel—much less my children of the *Foudroyant*! I love her as a fond father, a darling child, and glory in her deeds. I am vain enough to feel the effects of my school. Lord Keith sending me nothing, I have not, of course, a free communication. I have wrote to him for permission to return to England, when you will see a broken-hearted man. . . . My complaint, which is principally a swelling of the heart, is at times alarming to my friends. . . ." "My mind is fixed for retreat at this moment," he informs "fighting Berry." "Assure all the *Foudroyants* of my sincere regard and affection for them. *They may depend upon me.*" "I glory in them, my darling children, served in my school, and all of us caught our professional zeal and fire from the great and good Earl of St Vincent"—thus he writes to Keith. None of his hundreds of letters more fully reveals the charming nature of the man, than those quoted above. While Nelson was fond enough of glory for himself, he was too large-hearted to deprive others of it.

We have now to return to his unhappy and miscalculated transactions with the people whom he served not wisely but too well, to show him again "a vehement partisan of the Court of Naples," as Judge O'Connor Morris expresses it. "I purpose going in the *Foudroyant*," he tells Keith, on the 12th May, "in a few days, to

Palermo, as I am under an old promise to her Sicilian Majesty, that whenever she returned to the Continent, I would escort her over. Her Majesty has now made application to me for that purpose; and, as it may be necessary to take another Ship for the escort, I purpose taking the *Alexander* with me." It is clear that Nelson had no right to enter into any such arrangement, especially as there were too few rather than too many ships for the blockade of Malta. Before Keith's despatch was received forbidding Nelson to use the vessels, the Admiral had left Malta for Palermo, which he reached on the 31st May. But he *did* get a despatch ordering him to take the ships then at Leghorn to Spezia, which Nelson only partly obeyed, and stationed himself at the former port to await the convenience of the Queen and family. There he was met on the 24th June by his Commander-in-chief, whose feelings may be gauged by his letter to the Hon. A. Paget, Sir William Hamilton's successor as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the King of the Two Sicilies. It was written at Leghorn on the 16th July, two days after the disastrous defeat of the Austrians by Napoleon at Marengo.

He says: "I was so displeased by the withdrawing of the Ships from before Malta, and with other proceedings that Her Majesty did not take any notice of me latterally which had no effect on my attention to Her Rank, what a Clamour to letting in the Ships to Malta will occasion I assure you nothing has given me more real concern it was so near exhausted."<sup>1</sup> "The Paget Papers" make it quite clear that Queen Caroline did not go out of her way to impress Keith, but rather exhibited a fondness for snubbing him. He writes to Paget on another occasion to the effect that "the Queen expected the Whole Squadron to attend on Her Court which was impossible a Riot happened in the Square the Queen desired I would go to the people, I declined having no

<sup>1</sup> The arrival of *La Marguerite* on the 14th June, with provisions for the French garrison. Keith's letters are printed as he wrote them.



Authority to do so and disapproving of all tumults on every pretence in short Her Majesty took leave of Every one in Public but me. . . ." An extremely important letter<sup>1</sup> will also be found in the same collection of documents which sheds much light on the personalities of the Royal folk with whom Nelson had so much to do in this phase of his career. Paget is writing to Lord Grenville, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs :

"The King, whose real character has from circumstances shown itself during and since the revolution more than at any former period, is timid and bigoted and, as is often the case in the same disposition, cruel and revengeful. He has no natural turn for, nor do his habits allow him to attend to business. He has no guide for his Conduct but that of private consideration, and to take the present Instance, whatever plea he may set forth for delaying his return to Naples, I am in my own mind convinced, and I should not utter these opinions but upon the surest grounds, that His Sicilian Majesty labours under the strongest apprehensions for his own personal safety.

"The Queen's character generally is too well known to Your Lordship to require any comment upon it from me. I have every reason to suppose that not from principles but from pique, Her Sicilian Majesty has been very violent in opposing the King's return since my arrival. She had been taught to believe that I was sent here to Dictate and to use haughty language upon the Subject, at which idea I know from *undoubted authority* she was most violently irritated. . . . But I have reason to think that She has entirely lost her Influence, though she meddles as much as ever in business. She assists at every Council that is held. . . .

"The King and Queen of Naples are, as I have already mentioned, upon the worst terms. . . . His Sicilian Majesty considers the former intrigues of the Queen as the principal cause of the misfortunes that have befallen Him. He has made a solemn vow not to return with

Her to Naples, on which account he is anxious that she should take this Journey to Vienna." He adds that he has been led to suppose that Queen Caroline's visit to Vienna "is to endeavour to produce a change in the disposition of that Court which is thought to be extremely unfriendly," and that her Majesty's uneasiness was due to a suspicion that the Emperor might be led to take advantage of the defenceless state of the Sicilian dominions. In a "Private and Confidential" note to Grenville of the same date dealing with the intrigues of Lady Hamilton who, according to Paget, had represented him as a Jacobin and coxcomb, he mentions Nelson's health as "I fear sadly impaired, & I am assured that his fortune is fallen into the same state in consequence of great losses which both His Lordship & Lady Hamilton have sustained at Faro & other Games of Hazard. They are expected back from Malta every day, & are then I understand to proceed by Sea to England."

The Earl of Dundonald affords us an intimate glimpse of Nelson at this time in his "Autobiography." He was then serving under Keith, and had several conversations with the great sailor during the visit of the Commander-in-chief to Palermo. "From one of his frequent injunctions, 'Never mind manœuvres, always go at them,' I subsequently had reason," he says, "to consider myself indebted for successful attacks under apparently difficult circumstances.

"The impression left on my mind during these opportunities of association with Nelson was that of his being an embodiment of dashing courage, which would not take much trouble to circumvent an enemy, but being confronted with one would regard victory so much a matter of course as hardly to deem the chance of defeat worth consideration."

Permission for Nelson's return home, either by land or sea, was duly granted by the Admiralty. Earl Spencer took occasion to mildly rebuke the Admiral in a private letter, stating that in his opinion it appears

"more advisable for you to come home at once, than to be obliged to remain inactive at Palermo, while active service was going on in other parts of the station. I should still much prefer your remaining to complete the reduction of Malta, which I flatter myself cannot be very far distant." At the time of writing, news of the capture of the *Guillaume Tell* had not been received. After hoping that she might strike to Nelson's flag, Spencer adds: "I am quite clear, and I believe I am joined in opinion by all our friends here, that you will be more likely to recover your health and strength in England than in an inactive situation at a Foreign Court, however pleasing the respect and gratitude shown to you for your services may be, and no testimonies of respect and gratitude from that Court to you can be, I am convinced, too great for the very essential services you have rendered it."

Nelson struck his flag on the 11th July, and proceeded to England by way of Florence, Ancona, Trieste, and Vienna. The journey was made by land so far as Ancona, where the Queen, Nelson, Lord and Lady Hamilton, and Miss Knight were taken on board a Russian vessel and landed at Trieste on the 2nd August. The last-mentioned lady, to whom we have been introduced on a previous page, was intimately acquainted with her more eminent companions. The journey was of a very adventurous nature, as the following extracts from her letters to "fighting Berry," printed by Nicolas, will prove:—

"July 16th.—. . . Lord Nelson is going on an expedition he disapproves, and against his own convictions, because he has promised the Queen, and that others advise her. I pity the Queen. Prince Belmonte directs the march; and Lady Hamilton, though she does not like him, seconds his proposals, because she hates the sea, and wishes to visit the different Courts of Germany. Sir William says *he* shall die by the way, and he looks so ill, that I should not be surprised if he did. I am astonished that the Queen, who is a sensible

woman,<sup>1</sup> should consent to run so great a risk ; but I can assure you, that neither she nor the Princesses forget their great obligations to you. . . .

"ANCONA, 24th July, 1800.—As I find delays succeed each other, and England still recedes from us, I will not omit, at least, informing you of our adventures. We left Leghorn the day after I wrote to you, . . . and owing more to good fortune than to prudence, arrived in twenty-six hours at Florence, after passing within *two miles* of the French advanced posts. After a short stay, we proceeded on our way to this place. At Castel San Giovanni, the coach, in which were Lord Nelson, and Sir William and Lady Hamilton, was overturned ; Sir William and Lady Hamilton were hurt, but not dangerously. The wheel was repaired, but broke again at Arezzo—the Queen two days' journey before them, and news of the French Army advancing rapidly, it was therefore decided that they should proceed, and Mrs Cadogan<sup>2</sup> and I remain with the broken carriage, as it was of less consequence we should be left behind, or taken, than they . . . Just as we were going to set off, we received accounts of the French being very near the road where we had to pass, and of its being also infested with Neapolitan deserters ; but at the same moment arrived a party of Austrians, and the Officers gave us two soldiers as a guard. We travelled night and day ; the roads are almost destroyed, and the misery of the inhabitants is beyond description. At length, however, we arrived at Ancona, and found that the Queen had given up the idea of going in the *Bellona*, an Austrian Frigate, fitted up with silk hangings, carpets, and eighty beds for her reception, and now meant to go with a Russian Squadron of three Frigates and a Brig. I believe she judged rightly ; for there had been a mutiny on board the *Bellona*, and, for the sake of accommodation, she had reduced her guns to twenty-four, while the French, in possession of the Coast, arm Trabaccoli, and

<sup>1</sup> Compare this statement with that of Paget, given on p. 154.

<sup>2</sup> Lady Hamilton's mother.

other light Vessels, that could easily surround and take her. This Russian Squadron is commanded by Count Voinovitsch, a Dalmatian, who having seen his people ill-treated, and their colours destroyed by the Germans last year at the Siege of Ancona, made a vow never to come ashore, and keeps it religiously, for he has not returned the Queen's visit. . . . Lord Nelson talks often of the *Foudroyant*, whatever is done to turn off the conversation ; and last night he was talking with Captain Messer of the manoeuvres he intended to make in case he accepted of another command. In short, I perceive that his thoughts turn towards England, and I hope, and believe he will be happy there. . . . Lord Nelson has been received with acclamations in all the towns of the Pope's States. . . .

"TRIESTE, 9th of August, 1800.—. . . I told you we were become humble enough to rejoice at a Russian Squadron conveying us across the Adriatic ; but had we sailed, as was first intended, in the Imperial Frigate, we should have been taken by eight Trabaccoli, which the French armed on purpose at Pisaro. Sir William and Lady Hamilton, and Lord Nelson, give a miserable account of their sufferings on board the Commodore's Ship, (Count Voinovitsch).<sup>1</sup> He was ill in his cot ; but his First Lieutenant, a Neapolitan, named Capaci, was, it seems, the most insolent and ignorant of beings. Think what Lord Nelson must have felt ! He says a gale of wind would have sunk the Ship. . . . Poor Sir William Hamilton has been so ill, that the physicians had almost given him up ; he is now better, and I hope we shall be able to set off to-morrow night for Vienna. The Queen and thirty-four of her suite have had fevers ; you can form no idea of the *helplessness* of the party. How we shall proceed on our long journey, is to me a problem ; but we shall certainly get on as fast as we can ; for the very precarious state of Sir William's health has convinced everybody that it is necessary he should

<sup>1</sup> Miss Knight and Mrs Cadogan sailed on one of the frigates, commanded by Captain Messer, an Englishman.

arrange his affairs. . . . Poor Lord Nelson, whose only comfort was in talking of ships and harbours with Captain Messer, has had a bad cold ; but is almost well, and, I think, anxious to be in England. He is followed by thousands when he goes out, and for the illumination that is to take place this evening, there are many *Viva Nelsons*, prepared. He seems affected whenever he speaks of *you*, and often sighs out, 'Where is the *Foudroyant* ? ',"

The party arrived at Vienna in the third week of August 1800. Nelson became the hero of the hour. He was entertained in the most sumptuous way. The composer Haydn played to him while the Admiral — played at cards ! Nelson was surfeited by attentions for a month, before proceeding to Prague and Dresden. The beautiful and clever Mrs St George, who afterwards changed her name a second time and became Mrs Trench, and the mother of a celebrated Archbishop of Dublin, happened to be at the latter Court during the visit, and she confides to her Diary many interesting little happenings connected with Nelson and Lady Hamilton. The picture she paints of Sir William's wife is by no means so prepossessing as others, but at a certain dinner she was *vis-a-vis* "with only the Nelson party," which gives her a right to speak.

"It is plain," she writes, "that Lord Nelson thinks of nothing but Lady Hamilton, who is totally occupied by the same object. She is bold, forward, coarse, assuming, and vain. Her figure is colossal, but, excepting her feet, which are hideous, well-shaped. Her bones are large, and she is exceedingly *embonpoint*. She resembles the bust of Ariadne ; the shape of all her features is fine, as is the form of her head, and particularly her ears ; her teeth are a little irregular, but tolerably white ; her eyes light blue, with a brown spot in one, which, though a defect, takes nothing away from her beauty or expression. Her eyebrows and her hair are dark, and her complexion coarse. Her expression is strongly marked, variable, and interesting ; her movements in

common life ungraceful; her voice loud, yet not disagreeable. Lord Nelson is a little man, without any dignity, who, I suppose, must resemble what Suwarrow was in his youth, as he is like all the pictures I have seen of that General. Lady Hamilton takes possession of him, and he is a willing captive, the most submissive and devoted I have seen. Sir William is old, infirm, and all admiration of his wife, and never spoke to-day but to applaud her. Miss Cornelia Knight seems the decided flatterer of the two, and never opens her mouth but to show forth their praise; and Mrs Cadogan, Lady Hamilton's mother, is—what one might expect. After dinner we had several songs in honour of Nelson, written by Miss Knight, and sung by Lady Hamilton. She puffs the incense full in his face, but he receives it with pleasure, and snuffs it up very cordially."

In another passage Mrs Trench refers to Lady Hamilton's representations of statues and paintings which Romney painted so delightfully. "She assumes their attitude, expression, and drapery with great facility, swiftness, and accuracy." When she sang she was frequently out of tune, and her voice had "no sweetness." Mrs Trench sums up the character of her subject as "bold, daring, vain even to folly, and stamped with the manners of her first situation<sup>1</sup> much more strongly than one would suppose, after having represented Majesty, and lived in good company fifteen years. Her ruling passions seem to me vanity, avarice, and love for the pleasures of the table. She showed a great avidity for presents, and has actually obtained some at Dresden by the common artifice of admiring and longing."

It is not a pleasant picture, and is perhaps a little overdrawn, but even allowing a certain amount of latitude for the severity of a woman criticising a member of her sex with whom she has little in common, it must be confessed that contemporary opinion is very largely on

<sup>1</sup> She was the daughter of a domestic servant, and at the age of thirteen became a children's nurse.

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the side of the young and beautiful widow who thus confided her opinion so emphatically in the pages of her private journal.

Hamburg was reached on the 21st of October. Here Nelson met Dumouriez, the veteran hero of the battle of Jemappes, and according to Miss Cornelia Knight, "the two distinguished men took a great fancy to one another. . . . Dumouriez at that time maintained himself by his writings, and Lord Nelson forced him to accept a hundred pounds, telling him he had used his sword too well to live only by his pen." Ten days after the arrival of the party at Hamburg they embarked for England. When Nelson stepped on shore at Yarmouth on the 6th November 1800, the crowd which had assembled greeted him with all the enthusiasm of such gatherings when a great and popular man is in their midst. Some of the more boisterous spirits unharnessed the horses of the carriage awaiting the Admiral and his friends and drew them to their destination, a certain well-known hostelry in the town.

Thus England welcomed back the hero of the Nile and a pillar of the Sicilian Kingdom after an absence of nearly three years, every day of which had been lived to the full.



## CHAPTER XIV

# The Campaign of the Baltic

(1800-1)

*'The service of my King and Country is the object nearest my heart.'*

NELSON.

OSTENSIBLY Nelson had come back to England because of illness. That his health was improved by the prolonged journey home via the overland route is quite possible. The relief from worry as to the Mediterranean in general and to Keith in particular no doubt conduced largely to so desirable a result. It is evident that he had returned to a normal condition of mind and of body; otherwise we should not find him writing to the Secretary of the Admiralty on the day of his arrival in England that his health was "perfectly re-established" and that he wished "to serve immediately."

Nelson did not have to wait long for his wishes to be fulfilled. On the first day of the new year he was made a Vice-Admiral of the Blue, not as a reward for his services but in a general promotion. A little over a fortnight later he hoisted his flag on the *San Josef* (112), one of the prizes of the battle off Cape St Vincent, commanded by the devoted Hardy. Nelson then made the request, apparently on the principle of "nothing venture nothing have," that the Lords of the Admiralty would not consider his "necessary coming from Italy as a dereliction of the service, but only a remove from the Mediterranean to the Channel." Although he was a favourite of the rank and file of

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the Navy, he was certainly not esteemed so highly by "the powers that be." No doubt he was himself partly responsible. His friend Collingwood's "Correspondence" at the time affords a little sidelight on the matter. "We are at present lying completely ready," he writes on the 25th January, "and, on the least motion made by the enemy, should sail; so you may conceive what an anxious time I have of it. Lord Nelson is here; and I think he will probably come and live with me when the weather will allow him; but he does not get in and out of ships well with one arm. He gave me an account of his reception at Court, which was not very flattering, after having been the admiration of that of Naples. His Majesty merely asked him if he had recovered his health; and then, without waiting for an answer, turned to General —, and talked to him near half an hour in great good humour. It could not be about his successes."

The early days of the nineteenth century were overshadowed by a storm-cloud which burst with sudden fury and dispersed almost as rapidly, giving place to a short-lived peace followed by twelve years of incessant tempest. So far back as 1780 Russia, Sweden and Denmark had entered into a league of Armed Neutrality by which, in the terse summing-up of Laughton, they had "bound themselves to resist the right of 'visit and search' claimed by the belligerents, and to enforce the acceptance of certain principles of so-called international law: among others, the security of a belligerent's property under a neutral flag,—'a free ship makes free goods'; that a blockade to be binding must be maintained by an adequate force; and that 'contraband of war' must be distinctly defined beforehand. As these principles, if admitted by England, amounted to the import by France of naval stores,—masts, hemp, tar—from the Baltic, to be paid for by French exports, the English Government was resolved to contest them." From 1793 to 1800 Sweden and Denmark were neutral, but Great Britain, secure

in her maritime supremacy, had continued to search merchant-ships, whether convoyed by a vessel of war or not. Matters were brought to a crisis by the capture of the Danish frigate *Freya* on the 25th July 1800, and the subsequent passage of the Sound by a British squadron. At the moment Denmark was not prepared for hostilities, and entered into a convention with Great Britain, which admitted the right of search.

When, a little later, the half-crazy Czar, Paul I., dissatisfied with England as an ally, and led on by specious promises on the part of Napoleon, definitely renewed the League, the two Baltic Powers willingly joined him. He laid an embargo on all British ships in Russian ports, and generally showed that it was a case of "off with the old love and on with the new."

It was thought in England that negotiations, backed by a strong fleet, would be sufficient to sever Denmark from the alliance. With this object in view fifteen sail-of-the-line<sup>1</sup> having a considerable number of soldiers on board for use if necessary, and attended by a collection of smaller vessels, sailed early in March. When Nelson heard of Sir Hyde Parker's appointment as Commander-in-chief, he was no more pleased than when Keith had returned to his former station in the previous year, but he wisely smothered his disappointment. His "sole object," he informs Lord St Vincent, "and to which all my exertions and abilities tend, is to bring this long war to an honourable termination; to accomplish which, we must all pull in the collar, and, as we have got such a driver who will make the lazy ones pull as much as the willing, I doubt not but we shall get safely, speedily, and honourably to our journey's end." This is Nelson at his best, the Nelson who could sacrifice himself for King and Country. It was not until the 17th February that he received definite instructions to "put himself under the command" of Parker. Shortly afterwards he changed his ship for the *St George* (98). "The *St George* will

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards increased to eighteen.

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stamp an additional ray of glory to England's fame, if Nelson survives ; " he writes to Lady Hamilton, " and that Almighty Providence, who has hitherto protected me in all dangers, and covered my head in the day of battle, will still, if it be his pleasure, support and assist me." To his old friend Berry he says, " I hope we shall be able as usual to get so close to our Enemies that our shot cannot miss their object, and that we shall again give our Northern Enemies that hail-storm of bullets which is so emphatically described in the 'Naval Chronicle,' and which gives our dear Country the Dominion of the Seas. We have it, and all the Devils in Hell cannot take it from us, if our Wooden walls have fair play." As this letter was penned on the 9th March, before the armament left Yarmouth, it is clear that the Admiral did not set much store by the proposed negotiations, for which purpose Mr Vansittart,<sup>1</sup> reputed to be a skilful diplomatist, sailed with the fleet when it weighed anchor three days later.

The first general rendezvous was the Skaw, which was made on the 19th. A period of heavy weather—bad winds, sleet, snow, frost, and rain—had set in. Believers in omens not unnaturally predicted the ill-success of the expedition, which was intensified by the loss of the *Invincible* (74) with some 400 souls. She struck a sandbank, floated off into deep water, and then went down. Nelson's own ship was not in the best of condition ; she was both leaky and uncomfortable. However, a vessel is but a means to an end, and so long as the *St George* could float and her men could fire a broadside Nelson was content. In his eager, passionate way, the Admiral strongly disapproved of what he had been able to ascertain of Parker's plans : "honour may arise from them, good cannot. I hear we are likely to anchor outside Cronenburg Castle, instead of Copenhagen, which would give weight to our negotiation : a Danish Minister would think twice before he would put his name to war with England,

<sup>1</sup> Subsequently Lord Bexley.

when the next moment he would probably see his Master's Fleet in flames, and his Capital in ruins; but 'out of sight out of mind,' is an old saying. The Dane should see our Flag waving every moment he lifted up his head."

A council of war was held on the 23rd. On the following day Nelson wrote a lengthy letter to the Commander-in-chief detailing his opinion of what should be done, Vansittart's latest report being to the effect that the Danish Government was hostile "in the greatest possible degree." He urged that not a moment should be lost in attacking the enemy. He brings all the persuasiveness of which he was capable to bear on Parker. "Here you are," he says, "with almost the safety, certainly with the honour of England more intrusted to you, than ever yet fell to the lot of any British Officer." This is exaggerating somewhat, but doubtless the writer felt deeply the urgency of the matter. "On your decision depends," he adds with nearer approach to truth, "whether our Country shall be degraded in the eyes of Europe, or whether she shall rear her head higher than ever: again do I repeat, never did our Country depend so much on the success of any Fleet as on this." He then proceeds to sketch a plan of campaign, starting with the supposition that the fleet enters by the Passage of the Sound. He allows for a certain amount of damage "amongst our masts and yards" taking place before Cronenburg is reached. There the ships and Crown Island are attacked, "Ships crippled, and perhaps one or two lost." This mode Nelson calls "taking the bull by the horns," and does not prevent the ships from Revel, or the Swedish squadron, from joining their allies. He therefore proposes passing Cronenburg, "taking the risk of damage," to "pass up the deepest and straightest Channel above the Middle Grounds; and coming down the Garbar or King's Channel, to attack their Floating batteries, &c., &c., as we find it convenient. It must have the effect of preventing a junction between the

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Russians, Swedes, and Danes, and may give us an opportunity of bombarding Copenhagen." He also suggests a passage to the northward of Southolm. An alternative mode of attack is by the passage of the Belt, an attack on Draco, thus preventing the junction of the Russians, and "with every probability of success against the Danish Floating batteries." His concluding words are in the true Nelson spirit: "Supposing us through the Belt with the wind first westerly, would it not be possible to either go with the Fleet, or detach ten Ships of three and two decks, with one Bomb and two Fire-Ships, to Revel, to destroy the Russian Squadron at that place? I do not see the great risk of such a detachment, and with the remainder to attempt the business at Copenhagen. The measure may be thought bold, but I am of opinion the boldest measures are the safest; and our Country demands a most vigorous exertion of her force, directed with judgment." Nelson concludes with the assurance that "no exertion of head or heart" shall be wanting on his part.

The proposed terms were definitely refused by Denmark, but Nelson's "bold measure" of detaching part of the British fleet to attack the Russian squadron at Revel while the other attacked the Capital did not appeal to the unimaginative Parker. Copenhagen must first be overcome. The pilots also assured the Commander-in-chief that the passage of the Belt was the safest, which drew from Nelson the abrupt but thoroughly characteristic reply, "Let it be by the Sound, by the Belt, or any how, only lose not an hour!" Eventually the Sound was chosen.

Having shifted his flag from the *St George* to the *Elephant* (74), a more serviceable ship for the difficult passage, the British fleet, in order of battle, slowly threaded its way through the shoals on the 30th March, Nelson commanding the van, Parker the centre, and Graves the rear. The guns of Cronenburg Castle, dominating the Sound, blazed away, as did those on

the armed hulks with which the Danes had hoped to defend the narrow channel, but the Swedish guns maintained a stolid silence. The fleet then anchored a few miles below Copenhagen. Parker, Nelson, and several other officers boarded a lugger to reconnoitre the enemy's defences. Various soundings were made to the accompaniment of gun-firing, and it was found that the enemy had placed a formidable flotilla, including two 70-gun ships, a frigate, and two dismasted 64-gun ships, in the front of the harbour and arsenal. The Trekroner Battery had also been strengthened. A second council of war was held on the 31st, some interesting particulars of which are furnished by Colonel William Stewart, who was in command of some of the troops. After some difficulties had been stated anent "the three Powers we should either have to engage, in succession or united, in those seas," Stewart tells us that "Lord Nelson kept pacing the cabin, mortified at everything that savoured either of alarm or irresolution. When the above remark was applied to the Swedes, he sharply observed, 'The more numerous the better'; and when to the Russians, he repeatedly said, 'So much the better, I wish they were twice as many, the easier the victory, depend on it.'"

"At the battle of Copenhagen," writes Mr Ferguson, surgeon of the *Elephant*, "I was amongst the companions of the hero. The attempt was arduous in the extreme: no common mind would have dared to conceive it; but it was suited to the exalted enterprise of Lord Nelson. As *his* was the invigorating spirit of the council that planned the attack, so in the execution *he* only could have commanded success. During the interval that preceded the battle, I could only silently admire when I saw the first man in all the world spend the hours of the day and night in boats, amid floating ice, and in the severest weather; and wonder when the light shewed me a path marked by buoys, which had been trackless the preceding evening.

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“On the first day of April, in the afternoon, we took our departure with twelve sail-of-the-line, and a proportionate number of smaller vessels, from the main body of the fleet, then lying about four miles below Copenhagen; and coasted along the outer edge of the shoal called the middle ground, until we doubled its farthest extremities, when the fleet cast anchor. This shoal, of the same extent as the sea front of the town, lies exactly before it, at about three-quarters of a mile in distance; the interval between it and the shore had deep water, and is called the King’s Channel.

“In this channel the Danes had arranged their defence, as near the town as possible. It consisted of nineteen ships and floating batteries, flanked at the town’s extremity by two artificial islands at the mouth of the harbour, called the Crown batteries, and extending for a mile along the whole front of the town, leaving intervals for the batteries on shore to play.

“As our anchor dropped at eight in the evening, Nelson emphatically called out, ‘I will fight them the moment I have a fair wind.’ He spent the whole night in consultation.

“About half-past nine A.M. of the 2nd of April, the signals of the different ships having been made, repeated, and answered, we had the mortification to see the *Agamemnon* get upon the shoal on the first attempt to leave her anchorage, where she remained immovable. A similar misfortune followed in succession to the *Russell* and *Polyphemus*; and in addition to all this, the *Jamaica* frigate, with a convoy of gun-boats and the small craft having fallen in with the counter current, and being unable to stem it, made the signal of inability to proceed. A mind less invincible than Nelson’s might have been discouraged: though the battle had not commenced, yet he had approached the enemy; and he felt that he could not retreat or wait for reinforcements, without compromising the glory of his country. The signal to bear down was still kept flying. His agitation during these moments was extreme; I



shall never forget the impression it made on me. It was not, however, the agitation of indecision, but of ardent animated patriotism, panting for glory, which had appeared within his reach, and was vanishing from his grasp."

## CHAPTER XV

# The Battle of Copenhagen

(1801)

*"I have a right to be blind sometimes."*

NELSON.

**A**DMIRAL MAHAN, the most scientific of biographical historians, assures us that the fullest and most interesting account of the Battle of Copenhagen is that of Colonel William Stewart, an eye-witness of the thrilling scene and "a very fine gallant man" according to Nelson. The following particulars are therefore extracted from his graphic narrative :

"The Action began at five minutes past ten. In about half an hour afterwards, the first half of our Fleet was engaged, and before half past eleven, the Battle became general. The *Elephant's* station was in the centre, opposite to the Danish Commodore. . . . The judgment with which each Ship calculated her station in that intricate Channel, was admirable throughout. The failure of the three Ships that were aground, and whose force was to have been opposed to the Trekroner battery, left this day, as glorious for seamanship as for courage, incomplete. . . . The gallant Riou, perceiving the blank in the original plan for the attack of the Crown Battery, proceeded down the Line with his Squadron of Frigates, and attempted, but in vain, to fulfil the duty of the absent Ships of the Line. His force was unequal to it ; and the general signal of recall, which was made about mid-action by the Commander-

in-Chief, had the good effect of, at least, saving Riou's Squadron from destruction.

"About one P.M., few if any of the Enemy's heavy Ships and Praams had ceased to fire. The *Isis* had greatly suffered by the superior weight of the *Provestein's* fire; and if it had not been for the judicious diversion of it by the *Desirée*, Captain Inman, who raked her, and for other assistance from the *Polyphemus*, the *Isis* would have been destroyed. Both the *Isis* and *Bellona* had received serious injury by the bursting of some of their guns. The *Monarch* was also suffering severely under the united fire of the *Holstein* and *Zealand*; and only two of our Bomb-vessels could get to their station on the Middle Ground, and open their mortars on the Arsenal, directing their shells over both Fleets. Our Squadron of Gun-brigs, impeded by currents, could not, with the exception of one, although commanded by Captain Rose in the *Jamaica*, weather the eastern end of the Middle Ground, or come into Action. The Division of the Commander-in-chief acted according to the preconcerted plan; but could only menace the entrance of the Harbour. The *Elephant* was warmly engaged by the *Dannebrog*, and by two heavy Praams on her bow and quarter. Signals of distress were on board the *Bellona* and *Russell*, and of inability from the *Agamemnon*. The contest, in general, although from the relaxed state of the Enemy's fire, it might not have given much room for apprehension as to the result, had certainly, at one P.M., not declared itself in favour of either side. About this juncture, and in this posture of affairs, the signal was thrown out on board the *London*,<sup>1</sup> for the Action to cease.

"Lord Nelson was at this time, as he had been during the whole Action, walking the starboard side of the quarter-deck; sometimes much animated, and at others heroically fine in his observations. A shot through the mainmast knocked a few splinters about us. He observed to me, with a smile, 'It is warm work, and

<sup>1</sup> Parker's flag-ship.



'I really do not see the signal''  
Stephen Reid



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this day may be the last to any of us at a moment'; and then stopping short at the gangway, he used an expression never to be erased from my memory, and said with emotion, 'but mark you, I would not be elsewhere for thousands.' When the signal, No. 39, [to discontinue the engagement], was made, the Signal Lieutenant reported it to him. He continued his walk, and did not appear to take notice of it. The Lieutenant meeting his Lordship at the next turn asked, 'whether he should repeat it?' Lord Nelson answered, 'No, acknowledge it.' On the Officer returning to the poop, his Lordship called after him, 'Is No. 16 [for close action] still hoisted?' the Lieutenant answering in the affirmative, Lord Nelson said, 'Mind you keep it so.' He now walked the deck considerably agitated, which was always known by his moving the stump of his right arm. After a turn or two, he said to me, in a quick manner, 'Do you know what's shown on board of the Commander-in-chief, No. 39?' On asking him what that meant, he answered, 'Why, to leave off Action.' 'Leave off Action!' he repeated, and then added, with a shrug, 'Now, — me if I do.' He also observed, I believe, to Captain Foley, 'You know, Foley, I have only one eye—I have a right to be blind sometimes'; and then with an archness peculiar to his character, putting the glass to his blind eye, he exclaimed, 'I really do not see the signal.'<sup>1</sup> This remarkable signal was, therefore, only acknowledged on board the *Elephant*, not repeated. Admiral Graves did the latter, not being able to distinguish the *Elephant's* conduct: either by a fortunate accident, or intentionally, No. 16 was not displaced. The Squadron of Frigates obeyed the signal, and hauled off. That brave Officer, Captain Riou, was killed by a raking shot, when the *Amazon* showed her stern to the *Trekroner*. He was sitting

<sup>1</sup> This incident is bereft of much of its romance by the knowledge that Sir Hyde Parker sent a verbal message to the effect that the question of discontinuing the action was left to the discretion of Nelson.

on a gun, was encouraging his men, and had been wounded in the head by a splinter. He had expressed himself grieved at being thus obliged to retreat, and nobly observed, 'What will Nelson think of us?' His Clerk was killed by his side; and by another shot, several of the Marines, while hauling on the main-brace, shared the same fate. Riou then exclaimed, 'Come then, my boys, let us die all together!' The words were scarcely uttered, when the fatal shot severed him in two. Thus, and in an instant, was the British service deprived of one of its greatest ornaments, and society of a character of singular worth, resembling the heroes of romance.

"The Action now continued with unabated vigour. About two P.M., the greater part of the Danish Line had ceased to fire: some of the lighter Ships were adrift, and the carnage on board of the Enemy, who reinforced their crews from the Shore, was dreadful. The taking possession of such Ships as had struck, was, however, attended with difficulty; partly by reason of the batteries on Amak Island protecting them, and partly because an irregular fire was made on our Boats, as they approached, from the Ships themselves. The *Dannebrog* acted in this manner, and fired at our boat, although that Ship was not only on fire and had struck, but the Commodore, Fischer, had removed his Pendant, and had deserted her. A renewed attack on her by the *Elephant* and *Glatton*, for a quarter of an hour, not only completely silenced and disabled the *Dannebrog*, but, by the use of grape, nearly killed every man who was in the Praams, ahead and astern of that unfortunate Ship. On our smoke clearing away, the *Dannebrog* was found to be drifting in flames before the wind, spreading terror throughout the Enemy's Line. The usual lamentable scene then ensued; and our Boats rowed in every direction, to save the crew, who were throwing themselves from her at every port-hole; few, however, were left unwounded in her after our last broadsides, or could be saved. She drifted to leeward,

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and about half-past three blew up. The time of half-past two, brings me to a most important part of Lord Nelson's conduct on this day, and about which so much discussion has arisen: his sending a Flag of Truce on shore. To the best of my recollection, the facts were as follow. After the *Dannebrog* was adrift, and had ceased to fire, the Action was found to be over, along the whole of the Line astern of us; but not so with the Ships ahead and with the Crown batteries. Whether from ignorance of the custom of war, or from confusion on board the Prizes, our Boats were, as before mentioned, repulsed from the Ships themselves, or fired at from Amak Island. Lord Nelson naturally lost temper at this, and observed, 'That he must either send on shore, and stop this irregular proceeding, or send in our Fire-ships and burn them.' He accordingly retired into the stern gallery, and wrote, with great dispatch, that well-known Letter addressed to the Crown Prince,<sup>1</sup> with the address, 'To the Brothers of Englishmen, the brave Danes, &c.':<sup>2</sup> and this Letter was conveyed on shore through the contending Fleets by Captain Sir Frederick Thesiger, who acted as his Lordship's Aid-de-camp; and found the Prince near the Sally-port, animating his people in a spirited manner.

"Whether we were actually firing at that time in the

<sup>1</sup> TO THE GOVERNMENT OF DENMARK. *Elephant*, 2nd April, 1801: Lord Nelson's object in sending on shore a Flag of Truce is humanity: he, therefore, consents that hostilities shall cease till Lord Nelson can take his prisoners out of the Prizes, and he consents to land all the wounded Danes, and to burn or remove his Prizes. Lord Nelson, with humble duty to His Royal Highness, begs leave to say, that he will ever esteem it the greatest victory he ever gained, if this Flag of Truce may be the happy forerunner of a lasting and happy union between my most gracious Sovereign and his Majesty the King of Denmark.

<sup>2</sup> TO THE BROTHERS OF ENGLISHMEN, THE DANES. Lord Nelson has directions to spare Denmark, when no longer resisting; but if the firing is continued on the part of Denmark, Lord Nelson will be obliged to set on fire all the Floating-batteries he has taken, without having the power of saving the brave Danes who have defended them. Dated on board his Britannic Majesty's ship *Elephant*, Copenhagen Roads, April 2nd, 1801.



*Elephant* or not, I am unable to recollect ; it could only have been partially, at such of the farther Ships as had not struck. The three Ships ahead of us were, however, engaged ; and from the superiority of the force opposed to them, it was by no means improbable that Lord Nelson's observing eye pointed out to him the expediency of a prudent conduct. Whether this suggested to him the policy of a Flag of Truce or not, two solid reasons were apparent, and were such as to justify the measure : viz., the necessity of stopping the irregular fire from the Ships which had surrendered—and the singular opportunity that was thus given, of sounding the feelings of an Enemy, who had reluctantly entered into the war, and who must feel the generosity of the first offer of amity coming from a conquering foe. If there were a third reason for the conduct of the noble Admiral, and some of his own Officers assert this, it was unnecessary that it should have been expressed ; it was certainly not avowed, and will for ever remain a matter of conjecture.<sup>1</sup> While the Boat was absent, the animated fire of the Ships ahead of us, and the approach of two of the Commander-in-chief's division, the *Ramilies* and *Defence*, caused the remainder of the Enemy's Line to the eastward of the *Trekroner* to strike : that formidable Work continued its fire, but fortunately at too long a range to do serious damage to any one except the *Monarch*, whose loss in men, this day, exceeded that of any Line-of-Battle Ship during the war. From the uninjured state of this Outwork, which had been manned at the close of the Action with nearly 1500 men, it was deemed impracticable to carry into execution the projected plan for storming it ; the Boats for this service had been on the starboard side of each Ship during the

<sup>1</sup> Nelson afterwards found it necessary to address the Rt. Hon. Henry Addington, then Prime Minister, on the subject. In a letter written on the 8th May 1801, he refers to those who thought the sending of a flag of truce a *russe de guerre*, to others who "attributed it to a desire to have no more fighting, and few, very few, to the cause that I felt, and which I trust in God I shall retain to the last moment, *humanity*."

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Action. The firing from the Crown Battery and from our leading Ships did not cease until past three o'clock, when the Danish Adjutant-General, Lindholm, returning with a Flag of Truce, directed the fire of the battery to be suspended. The signal for doing the same, on our part, was then made from our Ship to those engaged. The Action closed after five hours' duration, four of which were warmly contested.

"The answer from the Prince Regent was to inquire more minutely into the purport of the message. I should here observe, that previous to the Boat's getting on board, Lord Nelson had taken the opinion of his valuable friends, Fremantle and Foley, the former of whom had been sent for from the *Ganges*, as to the practicability of advancing with the Ships which were least damaged, upon that part of the Danish Line of Defence yet uninjured. Their opinions were averse from it; and, on the other hand, decided in favour of removing our Fleet, whilst the wind yet held fair, from their present intricate Channel. Lord Nelson was now prepared how to act when Mr Lindholm came on board, and the following answer was returned to the Crown Prince by Captain Sir Frederick Thesiger: 'Lord Nelson's object in sending the Flag of Truce was humanity'; etc.<sup>1</sup> His Lordship, having finished this letter, referred the Adjutant-General to the Commander-in-Chief, who was at anchor at least four miles off, for a conference on the important points which the latter portion of the message had alluded to; and to this General Lindholm did not object, but proceeded to the *London*. Lord Nelson wisely foresaw, that, exclusive of the valuable opportunity that now offered itself for a renewal of Peace, time would be gained by this long row out to sea, for our leading Ships, which were much crippled, to clear the shoals, and whose course was under the immediate fire of the *Trekroner*. The Adjutant-General was no sooner gone to the *London*, and Captain Thesiger despatched on shore than the

<sup>1</sup> The letter will be found in full in footnote 1, p. 176.

signal was made for the *Glatton*, *Elephant*, *Ganges*, *Defiance*, and *Monarch*, to weigh in succession. The intricacy of the Channel now showed the great utility of what had been done; the *Monarch*, as first Ship, immediately hit on a shoal, but was pushed over it by the *Ganges* taking her amid-ships. The *Glatton* went clear, but the *Defiance* and *Elephant* ran aground, leaving the Crown Battery at a mile distance; and there they remained fixed, the former until ten o'clock that night, and the latter until night, notwithstanding every exertion which their fatigued crews could make to relieve them. Had there been no cessation of hostilities, their situation would certainly have been perilous; but it should be observed, on the other hand, that measures would in that case have been adopted, and they were within our power, for destroying this formidable Work.

"The *Elephant* being aground, Lord Nelson followed the Adjutant-General, about four o'clock, to the *London*, where that negotiation first began, which terminated in an honourable Peace. He was low in spirits at the surrounding scene of devastation, and particularly felt for the blowing up of the *Dannebrog*. 'Well!' he exclaimed, 'I have fought contrary to orders, and I shall perhaps be hanged: never mind, let them.' Lindholm returned to Copenhagen the same evening, when it was agreed that all Prizes should be surrendered, and the suspension of hostilities continue for twenty-four hours; the whole of the Danish wounded were to be received on shore. Lord Nelson then repaired on board the *St George*, and the night was actively passed by the Boats of the Division which had not been engaged, in getting afloat the Ships that were ashore, and in bringing out the Prizes. The *Desirée* frigate, towards the close of the Action, going to the aid of the *Bellona*, became fast on the same shoal; but neither these Ships, nor the *Russell*, were in any danger from the Enemy's batteries, as the world has frequently since been led to suppose."

In sending a copy of Nelson's Report to the Admiralty, Sir Hyde Parker paid a worthy tribute to the conduct

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of his second-in-command and of his "entire acquiescence and testimony of the bravery and intrepidity with which the Action was supported throughout the Line. Was it possible," he continues, "for me to add anything to the well-earned renown of Lord Nelson, it would be by asserting, that his exertions, great as they have heretofore been, never were carried to a higher pitch of zeal for his Country's service.

"I have only to lament that the sort of attack, confined within an intricate and narrow passage, excluded the Ships particularly under my command from the opportunity of exhibiting their valour; but I can with great truth assert, that the same spirit and zeal animated the whole of the Fleet; and I trust that the contest in which we were engaged, will on some future day afford them an occasion of showing that the whole were inspired with the same spirit, had the field been sufficiently extensive to have brought it into action."

Sentiments so ably expressed are delightful reading. Nelson, if less dignified in his language, never failed to show his warm appreciation of those who worked under him. Caring little for literary form, he invariably blurted out the naked truth. His despatches were marked by the same forcible characteristics exhibited in his conduct when engaging the enemy. "The spirit and zeal of the Navy," he tells a correspondent who had congratulated him on the victory, "I never saw higher than in this Fleet, and if England is true to herself, she may bid defiance to Europe. The French have always, in ridicule, called us a Nation of shopkeepers—so, I hope, we shall always remain, and, like other shopkeepers, if our goods are better than those of any other Country, and we can afford to sell them cheaper, we must depend on our shop being well resorted to."

An armistice for a term of fourteen weeks was agreed upon on the 9th April 1801. This period would allow Nelson to settle with the Russian fleet and return to Copenhagen, as he himself bluntly admitted during the

negotiations. Unused to such "straight talk" in diplomatic overtures, one of the Danish Commissioners began to speak of a renewal of hostilities. It merely added fuel to Nelson's fire, and drew from him the comment, made to one of his friends who was standing near, "Renew hostilities! Tell him we are ready at a moment; ready to bombard this very night." The remark was quite sufficient to silence the man who talked thus lightly of war.

An opportunity to teach the Russians a lesson did not come in Nelson's way. Scarcely more than a week passed from the time the signatures had dried on the parchment when to Parker was sent news of the murder of Paul I. With the death of the monarch Russian policy underwent a complete change so far as Great Britain was concerned. The castles in the air for the overthrow of the British rule in India, which the Czar and Napoleon had hoped to place on solid foundations, melted away as mist before the sun. Paul's successor, Alexander I., knowing full well the enormous importance of the British market for Russian goods, lost no time in coming to terms with England. Shortly afterwards Sweden, Denmark, and Prussia followed his example. The much-boasted Maritime Confederacy was quietly relegated to the limbo of defeated schemes for the downfall of the great Sea Power.

Meanwhile Sir Hyde Parker had been recalled from the Baltic, and had placed his command in the hands of Nelson on the 5th May. The latter proceeded from Kiöge Bay, his station since the birth of amicable arrangements with the Danes, to Revel, where he hoped to meet the Russian squadron he had been so anxious to annihilate before the battle of Copenhagen.

"My object was to get to Revel before the frost broke up at Cronstadt, that the twelve Sail of the Line might be destroyed," he writes to Addington, Pitt's successor as Prime Minister, on the 5th May. "I shall now go there as a friend, but the two Fleets shall not form a junction, if not already accomplished, unless my orders

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permit it." "My little trip into the Gulf of Finland," he tells Lord St Vincent, "will be, I trust, of National benefit, and I shall be kind or otherwise, as I find the folks." Revel harbour was bare when he entered it, the squadron having sailed for Cronstadt a few days before. However, on the 17th May, he was able to inform Vansittart, "I left Revel this morning where everybody has been kind to us." He eventually returned to Kiøge Bay, where he remained until he was relieved at his own request owing to ill-health. "I have been even at *Death's* door, apparently in a consumption," he tells Ball, probably with a touch of exaggeration. On the 19th June he set sail in a brig for home, arriving at Yarmouth on the first day of the following month. His last act before he quitted the fleet was to congratulate the men on the work they had accomplished; his first act when he stepped on shore was to visit the hospitals to which the wounded had been conveyed after the battle of Copenhagen. As for his own reward, the King had seen fit to create him Viscount Nelson of the Nile and Burnham Thorpe.

*"Let us think of them that sleep  
Full many a fathom deep  
By thy wild and stormy deep  
Elsinore!"*

## CHAPTER XVI

### The Threatened Invasion of England

(1801)

*"Our Country looks to its Sea defence, and let it not be disappointed."*  
NELSON.

HOWEVER much Nelson may have appreciated the visits to London, Box Hill, and Staines, which he now made in the company of Sir William and Lady Hamilton, it was soon evident that his stay on shore would be short. No home ties were severed when he was appointed to a special service on the 24th July 1801, for he had finally separated from his wife six months before. It was a mistaken match in every way. Although it is often said that people of opposite temperaments make the best partners in marriage, it certainly was not so in the case of Nelson and Mrs Nisbet. Some of the reasons for the unhappiness of both have been given in a previous chapter, the prime cause was Lady Hamilton, for whom Nelson continued to entertain a mad infatuation until the day he died. Quite naturally and legitimately Lady Nelson resented the conduct of her husband. Any woman would have done the same. Angry words were spoken on both sides, leading to the final and irrevocable breach, but it is characteristic of Nelson's generous nature that on their last interview he said: "I call God to witness there is nothing in you or your conduct I wish otherwise." He was no less generous in the allowance which he made to her.

For some months Napoleon had been intent on the

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building of a flotilla for the invasion of England. All manner of wild rumours had spread throughout the country as to the imminent peril of the United Kingdom, but we now know that the First Consul's scheme was comparatively insignificant when compared to his enormous ship-building programme of 1803-5 for the same purpose.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a month before Lord St Vincent, then First Lord of the Admiralty, communicated to Admiral Lutwidge, the Commander-in-chief in the Downs, that his command would be impinged upon to some extent by Nelson's new post, and that the enemy's preparations were "beginning to wear a very serious appearance," Napoleon had already postponed his plan. This is made abundantly clear by the First Consul's order of the 28rd June to Augereau, in command of the Army of Batavia: "You will receive instructions for the formation at Flushing of five divisions of gunboats, which, added to the sixteen divisions in Channel ports, will impose on England." Napoleon perfectly understood that the moment for "leaping the ditch" had not yet arrived. Of the Navy proper at the beginning of 1801 Great Britain had no fewer than 127 sail-of-the-line in commission; France had forty-nine, many in an almost unseaworthy condition. The Admiralty was not to know of the letter to Augereau or of the exact state of the French marine. Boulogne, Calais, and Dunkirk, the ports of concentration, sheltered some 150 boats of various descriptions for the purpose of the projected expedition, and England could afford to run no risks.

Nelson's command extended from Orfordness, in Suffolk, to Beachy Head, in Sussex. The specific purpose of his squadron was to defend the mouths of the Thames and Medway, and of the coasts of Sussex, Kent, and Essex. He speedily grasped the situation, and surmising that London *ought* to be the enemy's object, informed the Admiralty that not only should

<sup>1</sup> See "Napoleon and the Invasion of England," by H. F. B. Wheeler and A. M. Broadley, especially vol. i. pp. 169-194.



"A great number of Deal and Dover Boats" be available off Boulogne to "give notice of the direction taken by the enemy," but that gunboats and flat-boats should be kept near Margate and Ramsgate, between Orfordness and the North Foreland, and in Hollesley Bay, these to be aided by floating batteries. "If it is calm when the Enemy row out, all our Vessels and Boats appointed to watch them, must get into the Channel, and meet them as soon as possible: if not strong enough for the attack, they must watch, and keep them company till a favourable opportunity offers. If a breeze springs up," he goes on, "our Ships are to deal *destruction*; no delicacy can be observed on this great occasion. But should it remain calm, and our Flotilla not fancy itself strong enough to attack the Enemy on their passage, the moment that they begin to touch our shore, strong or weak, our Flotilla of Boats must attack as much of the Enemy's Flotilla as they are able—say only one half or two-thirds; it will create a most powerful diversion, for the bows of our Flotilla will be opposed to their unarmed sterns, and the courage of Britons will never, I believe, allow one Frenchman to leave the Beach." When the enemy comes in sight the various divisions of the flotilla "are to unite, but not intermix." "*Never fear the event.*" These notions, embodied in a lengthy Memorandum to the Admiralty, are remarkable because Nelson prophesies "a powerful diversion by the sailing of the Combined Fleet," a plan developed by Napoleon in the later phase of his gigantic preparations for the invasion of our country. Whatever may have been in his mind in 1801 regarding this scheme he certainly did not confide to any of his admirals or military commanders.

Nelson hoisted his flag on the *Unité* frigate at Sheerness on the 27th July. Additional evidence of the humorous turn of his mind is afforded in a note bearing the same date addressed to Lady Hamilton. "To-day," he writes, "I dined with Admiral Græme, who has also lost his right arm, and as the Commander of the

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Troops has lost his leg, I expect we shall be caricatured as the *lame* defenders of England." Most people who have the misfortune to lose a limb are inclined to resent any reference to the fact on the part of another and to rigidly ignore the misfortune in their own remarks, but Nelson rather gloried in his dismembered state than otherwise. It was visible proof of his service to his country.

Lord St Vincent did not altogether agree with Nelson's plans. In his opinion, "Our great reliance is on the vigilance and activity of our cruisers at sea." When Nelson urged upon the Sea Fencibles<sup>1</sup> to man the coast-defence vessels he was speedily disillusioned. Of the 2600 men enrolled on that part of the coast under his jurisdiction only 385 offered themselves for active service. However, he determined to do his best with the raw material at hand, and went so far as to tell the First Lord of the Admiralty that: "Our force will, by your great exertions, soon get so formidable, that the Enemy will hardly venture out." A week after he had assumed command, he says: "It is perfectly right to be prepared against a mad Government; but with the active force your Lordship has given me, I may pronounce it almost impracticable."

On the 2nd August Nelson was off the coast of France, "looking at Boulogne," and observed the soldiers erecting guns and mortars "as if fearful of an attack." Forty-eight hours later a number of bomb-vessels were anchored abreast of the port, and the shipping was fired on without much loss on either side, although several French gunboats were destroyed. He himself admitted: "The whole of this business is of no further moment than to show the Enemy, that, with impunity, they cannot come outside their Ports. I see nothing but a desire on the part of our Officers and men to get at them." A vast crowd of people collected on the cliffs at Dover and watched the spectacle. The *Moniteur*,

<sup>1</sup> A volunteer corps enrolled for the purpose of defending the coast.

the official organ of the French Government, reported the occurrence as follows :

"At dawn Nelson with thirty vessels of all sizes appeared before Boulogne. A division of our flotilla was at anchor slightly in front of the harbour. Their bomb-ketches opened fire and ours returned it. Several times the enemy's line tried to advance and our soldiers asked to be allowed to board, but the flotilla's fire prevented the forward movement and ultimately compelled the enemy to retire. Nine hundred bombs were fired during the day without killing or wounding any one. Two gun-sloops were slightly damaged but returned to service without loss of time. . . . This is the first fight in sight of *both* shores." Nelson reported that three of the flat-bottom boats and a brig were sunk, and that six went on shore "evidently much damaged," of which five were eventually saved. A captain of the Royal Artillery and three British seamen were wounded.

Having had the opportunity to see the preparations of the enemy Nelson was inclined to believe that Napoleon really meant business. "There can be no doubt of the intention of the French to attempt the Invasion of our Country," he tells four of the captains under his command. "I have now more than ever reason to believe," he confides to Lord St Vincent, "that the Ports of Flushing and Flanders are much more likely places to embark men from, than Calais, Boulogne, or Dieppe; for in Flanders we cannot tell by our eyes what means they have collected for carrying an Army." "My Flotilla, I hope, will be finished by Wednesday," he writes to the worthy Sea Lord, under date of the 7th August, "and I am vain enough to expect a great deal of mischief to the Enemy from it. I am sure that the French are trying to get from Boulogne; yet the least wind at W.N.W. and they are lost. I pronounce that no embarkation can take place at Boulogne; whenever it comes forth, it will be from Flanders, and what a forlorn undertaking! con-

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sider cross tides, etc., etc. As for rowing, that is impossible." This communication was shortly followed by another: "We are so prepared at this moment, on the Enemy's Coasts, that I do not believe they could get three miles from their own shore." Again, "Our active force is perfect, and possesses so much zeal, that I only wish to catch that Buonaparte on the water, either with the *Amazon* or *Medusa*; but himself he will never trust." The Admiral was far from enjoying his new post. He was "half sea-sick," and his one desire was "to get at a proper time clear of my present command, in which I am sure of diminishing my little fortune, which at this moment does not reach 10,000 £.; and never had I an idea of gaining money by accepting it." It would be wrong to infer from this isolated passage that Nelson was particularly fond of money. He was not, and the present writer is convinced that whenever he grumbled about financial matters he thought considerably more of justice than lucre. He could not bear to think he was being "done." In the present instance it is clear that he found his command trivial and unprofitable from a national point of view. Nelson was essentially the man for a big theatre of action; if he did not actually despise a confined stage he hated it as paltry and beneath him. He gloried in a battle, not in a sham-fight; as he himself complained, "there is nothing to be done on the great Scale." He appeals pathetically to Lord St Vincent in the letter from which the above extract is taken: "Do you still think of sending me to the Mediterranean? If not, I am ready to go, for the spur of the occasion, on the Expedition which is in embryo, but to return the moment it is over, for I am afraid of my strength. I am always ready, as far as I am able." "As far as September 14th, I am at the Admiralty's disposal;" he tells Lady Hamilton, "but, if Mr Buonaparte does not choose to send his miscreants before that time, my health will not bear me through equinoctial gales." The Admiral is just a little uncertain as to the fate of

Napoleon's flotilla. "I do not believe they could get three miles from their own shore," he says on the 9th August; on the 10th his "well-grounded hope" is that the enemy will be "annihilated before they get ten miles from their own shores."

Nelson considered Flushing as his "grand object" of attack, but hesitated to venture before consulting the Admiralty because "the risk is so great of the loss of some Vessels." It would be "a week's Expedition for 4000 or 5000 troops." To aid his own arguments he appeals to history: "To crush the Enemy at home was the favourite plan of Lord Chatham, and I am sure you think it the wisest measure to carry the war from our own doors. . . . I own, my dear Lord, that this Boat warfare is not exactly congenial to my feelings, and I find I get laughed at for my puny mode of attack. I shall be happy to lead the way into Helvoet or Flushing, if Government will turn their thoughts to it: whilst I serve, I will do it actively, and to the very best of my abilities. I have all night had a fever, which is very little abated this morning; my mind carries me beyond my strength, and will do me up; but such is my nature. I have serious doubt whether I shall be able, from my present feelings, to go to the Mediterranean; but I will do what I can—I require nursing like a child. Pray God we may have peace, and with honour, and then let us start fair with the rest of Europe." To other correspondents he says, "I am very much fagged"; "I am still very unwell, and my head is swelled."

Notwithstanding the weighty arguments brought forward by Nelson to support his projected attempt on Flushing, the Lords of the Admiralty could not see their way to grant the requisite permission. Nelson was so confident in his belief that he appealed to the Prime Minister. "Lord St Vincent," he writes, "tells me he hates Councils, so do I between Military men; for if a man consults whether he is to fight, when he has the power in his own hands, *it is certain that his*

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*opinion is against fighting* ; but that is not the case at present, and I own I do want good council. Lord St Vincent is for keeping the Enemy closely blockaded ; but I see that they get along shore inside their Sandbanks, and under their guns, which line the Coast of France. Lord Hood is for keeping our Squadrons of Defence stationary on our own shore, (except light Cutters, to give information of every movement of the Enemy ;) for the time is approaching when a gale of westerly wind will disperse our light Squadrons. . . . When men of such good sense, such great Sea Officers, differ so widely, is it not natural that I should wish the mode of defence to be well arranged by the mature considerations of men of judgment ? I mean not to detract from my judgment ; even as it is, it is well known : but I boast of nothing but my zeal ; in that I will give way to no man upon earth."

On the night of the 15th August Nelson renewed his attempt on the Boulogne flotilla. His plan of attack shows that he took elaborate precautions to preclude the possibility of failure. La Touche Tréville, in command at Boulogne, had also profited by his recent experience with the British, and had fitted out additional bomb-ketches and placed mortars on smacks for the purpose of defence. Nelson arranged that four divisions of ships' boats should be employed, each accompanied by one or two flat boats armed with either an 8-inch howitzer or a 24-pound carronade. Two boats of each division were to be prepared for cutting the enemy's cable and sternfast and to be provided with stout hook-ropes for the purpose of towing the prizes. "When any Boats have taken one Vessel, the business is not to be considered as finished ; but a sufficient number being left to guard the Prize, the others are immediately to pursue the object, by proceeding on to the next, and so on, until the whole Flotilla be either taken, or totally annihilated ; for there must not be the smallest cessation until their destruction is completely finished."

Pikes, cutlasses, tomahawks, axes, and all the paraphernalia of war were to be placed on the boats. Fast-sailing cutters were to keep close in shore so as to be ready to tow out any vessels which might be captured. "The greatest silence is to be observed by all the people in the Boats, and the oars to be muffled." The watchword was "Nelson," the answer "Bronté."

The attack was a failure. The brave fellows found the vessels not only full of soldiers but defended by sharp spikes of iron and netting placed round the hulls in a similar manner to the torpedo netting of modern naval warfare. It was said by the attacking party that the French boats were secured to the shore by stout cables, a belief entertained by Nelson, but La Touche Tréville indignantly denied the accusation in his official report. The British seamen went into a veritable halo of fire, the soldiers on the boats being assisted by comrades stationed on the heights. It was an unequal contest in every way, and when the second division of boats, under Captain Parker, closed with the enemy, it is stated that the French commander plainly said so. "You can do nothing here," he shouted, "and it is only useless shedding the blood of brave men to make the attempt."<sup>1</sup> Parker's thigh was shattered while attempting to board the French Commodore's boat, another officer was shot through the leg, and the killed and wounded were numbered at 172. Officially the French casualties were returned at ten killed and thirty wounded, probably a low estimate. "No person can be blamed for sending them to the attack but myself;" the Commander-in-chief writes to Lord St Vincent, "I knew the difficulty of the undertaking, therefore I ventured to ask your opinion." He attributed the failure to the divisions not having arrived "at the same happy moment with Captain Parker." "More determined, persevering courage, I never witnessed." "I long to pay them, for their tricks t'other day," he writes to Lady Hamilton, "the

<sup>1</sup> See "Annual Register," for 1801, n. 269.

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debt of a drubbing, which, surely, I'll pay : but *when, where, or how*, it is impossible, your own good sense must tell you, for me or mortal man to say."

Nelson was deeply attached to Captain Parker, whom he calls "my child, for I found him in distress." His correspondence at this time is replete with references to the condition of the patient. "Would I could be useful," he tells the doctor, "I would come on shore and nurse him." When the gallant officer died at Deal on the 28th September, the Admiral begged that his friend's hair might be cut off ; "it shall remain and be buried with me." Again we see the wistful, woman-like emotionalism of Nelson's nature. He calls it "a happy release," and says in the same sentence, "but I cannot bring myself to say I am glad he is gone ; it would be a lie, for I am grieved almost to death." When "the cleverest and quickest man and the most zealous in the world" was buried at Deal, Nelson attended the ceremony. It is recorded that the man who could stare Death in the face without flinching, who was "in perils oft" and enjoyed the experience, was visibly affected. The Admiral's grief was expressed in a practical way. Finding that the deceased Captain had left his finances in a most unsatisfactory condition he paid the creditors in full.

The war with France had lasted eight weary years. Great Britain had more than maintained her own on the sea ; Napoleon had proved his consummate skill in the manipulation of land forces. Overtures for peace were mooted, then definitely made through M. Otto, a French agent in London for the exchange of prisoners. The cessation of hostilities became the topic of the hour. After innumerable delays the preliminaries were signed in London on the 1st October 1801, to the joy of the populace on both sides of the Channel. Nelson was not convinced as to Napoleon's *bonâ fides*. He loathed the French and took no pains to disguise the fact. In writing to a friend a fortnight or so before he received news of the event mentioned



above, he admits, "I pray God we may have Peace, when it can be had with honour; but I fear that the scoundrel Buonaparte wants to humble us, as he has done the rest of Europe—to degrade us in our own eyes, by making us give up all our conquests, as proof of our sincerity for making a Peace, and then he will condescend to treat with us." The Admiral was not far wrong, as subsequent events proved. In a letter dated the 14th September, two days later than the one from which the above quotation is made, he looks forward "with hope but will not be too sanguine. I yet hope the negotiation is not broken entirely off, for we can never alter the situation of France or the Continent, and ours will become a War of defence; but I hope they will do for the best." Three days after the signature of the preliminaries of peace he warns the commanders of the various squadrons that they are to be "very vigilant in watching the Enemy, and, on no account to suffer them to put into the Channel, as hostilities have not yet ceased." Napoleon confirmed the treaty on the 5th October, the ratifications were exchanged on the 10th,

*"And London, tho' so ill repaid,  
Illuminations grand display'd,"*

as a poetaster sang in a contemporary periodical. Nelson referred to it as "good news," but received a note from Addington warning him that his flag must be kept flying until the Definitive Treaty had been signed.

When he heard that the mob had unharnessed the horses and drawn the carriage of General Lauriston, Napoleon's first *aide-de-camp* who had brought the document to London, the Admiral was furious. "Can you cure madness?" he asks Dr Baird, "for I am mad to read that . . . scoundrels dragged a Frenchman's carriage. I am ashamed for my Country." On the 14th October he formally asked the Admiralty to give him permission to go on shore. He was then suffering from "a complaint in my stomach and bowels,"

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probably caused by sea-sickness and cold. This request was not immediately complied with, but towards the end of the month he was released, and wrote to Lady Hamilton, "I believe I leave this little Squadron with sincere regret, and with the good wishes of every creature in it." One wonders whether there could be a more restless nature than Nelson's, which made him yearn for the land when at sea, and for the sea when on land.

He retired to Merton Place, a little estate in Surrey and "exactly one hour's drive from Hyde Park." This had been purchased on his behalf by Lady Hamilton, who took up her quarters there with her husband. The first mention of it in Nelson's "Dispatches and Letters," as edited by Sir Harris Nicolas, is in a note to his friend Alexander Davison of Morpeth, on the last day of August 1801. "So far from making money, I am spending the little I have," he tells him. "I am after buying a little Farm at Merton—the price £9000; I hope to be able to get through it. If I cannot, after all my labours for the Country, get such a place as this, I am resolved to give it all up, and retire for life." In thanking Mr Davison for his offer of assistance in purchasing "the Farm," Nelson goes a little deeper into the question of his personal expenditure. It will "take every farthing I have in the world," and leave him in debt. "The Baltic expedition cost me full £2000. Since I left London it has cost me, for Nelson cannot be like others, near £1000 in six weeks. If I am continued here (*i.e.* in the Downs) ruin to my finances must be the consequence, for everybody knows that Lord Nelson *is amazingly rich!*"

The Admiral took his seat in the House of Lords as a Viscount on the 29th October, and made his maiden speech in the upper chamber on the following day. Appropriately enough it was to second the motion "That the Thanks of this House be given to Rear-Admiral Sir James Saumarez, K.B., for his gallant and distinguished conduct in the Action with the Combined

Fleet of the Enemy, off Algeziras, on the 12th and 13th of July last." The battle was fought with a French and Spanish squadron in the Gut of Gibraltar, details of which were entered into by Nelson, doubtless to the considerable enlightenment of the House. During the following month he was also able to pay a similar tribute to Keith and his officers for their services in Egypt. With characteristic thoroughness he also remarked on the part the Army had played in the defeat of Napoleon's expedition.

He was feasted and feted for his own splendid work, but he fell foul of the Corporation of the City of London, because that body had seen fit to withhold its thanks for the victory of Copenhagen, conduct which he deemed "incomprehensible." He certainly never forgave the Government for refusing to grant medals for the same battle. Nelson brought up the question before the authorities with pugnacious persistence, and some of the officers renewed their application over a quarter of a century later, but the Copenhagen medal still remains to be struck. "I am fixed never to abandon the fair fame of my Companions in dangers," he avers. "I may offend and suffer; but I had rather suffer from that, than my own feelings." He fought for pensions and appointments for all manner of officers and men, watched the list of vacancies and appealed that they might be filled by those who deserved well of their country.

## CHAPTER XVII

### The Vigil off Toulon

(1803)

*"I shall follow them to the Antipodes."*

NELSON.

FOR over a year Nelson spent the greater part of his time at Merton Place or at 28 Piccadilly, Sir William Hamilton's town house. Any monotony there may have been was relieved by a tour of beautiful Wales, made in the months of July and August 1802, when Nelson's spirits had recovered somewhat from the news of his father's death at Bath on the 26th of the previous April. The old clergyman's distinguished son was ill at the time and did not attend the last sad ceremony in the quiet churchyard of Burnham Thorpe, where Nelson said he hoped his bones would eventually be laid to rest, a wish never to be fulfilled. His father, who called Merton "the Mansion of Peace," had entertained the idea of becoming "one of its inhabitants," and rooms had been prepared for him. "Sir William and myself are both old men, and we will witness the hero's felicity in retirement." Such was his desire.

On their journey to the Principality Nelson was presented with the freedom of Oxford, and both Sir William and the Admiral had the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws conferred upon them by the University. A visit was also paid to Blenheim, the ancestral seat of the Dukes of Marlborough. Gloucester, Ross, Monmouth, Brecon, Milford, Haverfordwest, Swansea.

Worcester, Birmingham, Warwick and other provincial cities and towns each accorded its distinguished visitor a most enthusiastic welcome. He afterwards drew up an elaborate report on the Forest of Dean for Mr Addington's inspection. Properly cultivated it would, in Nelson's opinion, "produce about 9200 loads of timber, fit for building Ships-of-the-line, every year." Collingwood, it may be added, was also deeply interested in afforestation. During the rare occasions he was on shore he would walk about his estate and stealthily take an acorn from his pocket and drop it in the earth for later service in his Majesty's Navy.

On his return to Surrey Nelson vegetated. "I am really so very little in the world," he tells Davison in October, "that I know little, if anything, beyond [what] Newspaper reports say respecting our conduct on the affairs of the Continent. It is true, I have seen Mr Addington and Lord St Vincent several times; but our conversations were like Swift's and Lord Oxford's. Yet it was not difficult to discover, that *we* felt our importance in the scale of Europe degraded, if Buonaparte was allowed to act as he has lately done; and that it was necessary for us to speak a dignified language. . . . By the meeting of Parliament many things must come forth."

The Hamilton-Nelson family forsook Merton for Piccadilly at the beginning of 1803, and there Sir William died on the 6th April, after having been tenderly nursed by his wife and her more than intimate friend. It is impossible to think that the Admiral had any heartfelt sorrow when the former Ambassador breathed his last, but his emotional nature led him to write the kindest things of the dead man. "The world never, never lost a more upright and accomplished gentleman" is one of his expressions at the event.

The Truce of Amiens, for it was nothing more, was described by George III. as "an experimental peace." Neither side kept strictly to the letter of the Treaty. Before the brilliant illuminations on both sides of the

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Channel had been entirely forgotten statesmen began to shake their heads and to prophecy the withdrawing of the sword from the scabbard. Napoleon's continued aggressions on the Continent, his great colonial schemes, his restless activity in matters which did not directly concern him, his threat to invade England showed how unreal were his wishes for a settled understanding. Great Britain declared war on the 16th May 1803, thus ending a peace which had lasted one year and sixteen days. An embargo was immediately laid on French ships and those of her allies in British ports or on the sea; Napoleon had been forestalled, an unusual occurrence. He had admitted to Decaen, who had been sent to India to sum up the political situation and to ascertain the number of troops necessary for the subjugation of England's oriental Empire, that he anticipated war would not break out before September 1804. He was annoyed, intensely annoyed, and ordered the seizure of every Briton in France on the pretext that two merchant vessels had been captured by English frigates before the declaration of war. This was a gross misrepresentation of facts; the ships mentioned were taken on the 18th May, the day Nelson hoisted his flag on the *Victory* at Portsmouth as Commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean. Within forty-eight hours he was at sea. His was a tremendous programme, and it is only possible to give an epitome of it here. He was to proceed to Malta, where he would probably find Rear-Admiral Sir Richard Bickerton and his squadron, which were to join him. After having made arrangements with Sir Alexander Ball for the protection and security of the island, Nelson was to take up such a position off Toulon as would enable him to destroy the enemy's vessels and to detain those belonging to the allied Batavian Republic. Particular attention was to be paid to the proceedings of the French at Genoa, Leghorn, and other ports of western Italy, "for the purpose of gaining the most early information of any armaments that may be formed there, either with a view to an attack upon

Egypt or any other port of the Turkish dominions, or against the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, or the islands of Corfu." Should such a plan be in contemplation Nelson was to do his best to counteract it, "as well as to afford to the Sublime Porte, and his Sicilian Majesty and their subjects, any protection or assistance which may be in your power, consistently with a due attention to the other important objects entrusted to your care."

There were good reasons for watching the conduct of Spain, which purported to be a neutral. The Admiral was therefore to watch for any sign of naval preparations by that Power in the Mediterranean and at Cadiz. No Spanish ships were to be allowed to form a junction with those of France or Batavia. As certain French sail-of-the-line recently employed in conveying troops to San Domingo might attempt to make for a southern port, Nelson was to detach part of his squadron to intercept them.

We must now turn our attention for a moment to the other admirals who watched the movements of the enemy's squadrons, or guarded our shores. Cornwallis was off Ushant, where he could mask the Brest fleet, Keith was in the Downs, Lord Gardner was at Portsmouth, Admiral George Montagu—shortly afterwards succeeded by Admiral Sir John Colpoys—was at Plymouth. Squadrons were detached from these fleets to watch off such important harbours as Ferrol and Rochefort, and also off the coast of Holland. The British colonies were not neglected. "Floating bulwarks" guarded them, for there was no knowing what deep-laid manœuvres Napoleon might evolve when once his super-active brain was bent on the problem of how to checkmate England on her own native element.

Meanwhile Nelson had reached Ushant and was searching for Cornwallis, with whom he was to leave the *Victory*, should the former think an additional sail-of-the-line necessary. As he did not find the Admiral he left the ship, shifted his flag to the *Amphion* frigate, called at Malta, and joined the fleet off Toulon on the 8th July.

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"With the casual absence of one or two ships, we shall be always seven sail-of-the-line," a none too formidable force to watch the "goings on" in the great southern arsenal, but he stuck to it with grim tenacity in fair weather and foul. He soon found that to all appearances from seven to nine French battle-ships and a considerable number of frigates and corvettes were sheltered in the harbour. Unfortunately Nelson's vessels were far from being in the best of condition; several of them were scarcely water-tight. His correspondence teems with reference to their bad state, as, for instance: "It is not a store-ship a week which could keep them in repair"; they had "crazy masts"; "their hulls want docking"; "I never saw a fleet altogether so well officered and manned. Would to God the ships were half as good, but they are what we call crazy"; "I do not believe that Lord St Vincent would have kept the sea with such ships," and so on.

With the *personnel* of the fleet Nelson had little fault to find, although he had occasion to issue a General Memorandum respecting the desertion of certain seamen or marines to the service of Spain. In his eyes nothing could atone for such conduct: "A Briton to put himself under the lash of a Frenchman or Spaniard must be more degrading to any man of spirit than any punishment I could inflict on their bodies." With this exception all was well. While "miserably short of men," he was able to declare, towards the end of September 1803: "We are at this moment the healthiest squadron I ever served in, for the fact is we have no sick, and are all in good humour," moreover they were "in fine order to give the French a dressing." Again: "The squadron has health beyond what I have almost ever seen, except our going to the Nile; and I hope, if the French will give us the opportunity, that our beef and pudding will be as well applied." No Admiral, before or since, has ever paid more attention to the health and comfort of the men who served under him. In the Memorandum to which we have just referred he contrasts the "one



shilling per day, and plenty of the very best provisions, with every comfort that can be thought of," with the "twopence a day, black bread, horse-beans, and stinking oil" allotted to those in the service of the enemy. Scurvy was rife when he joined the fleet, but Nelson obtained onions and lemons, recognised aids to the cure of the disorder, "and a sight of the French squadron twenty leagues at sea will cure all our complaints." Writing in August to his friend Dr Baird he seeks to entertain the physician by relating particulars of his treatment for scurvy. "I am now at work in Spain," he remarks, "and have procured some bullocks and a good supply of onions—the latter we have found the greatest advantage from." He adds: "The health of our seamen is invaluable; and to purchase that, no expense ought to be spared." He even managed to secure cattle and vegetables from France. The fleet was watered at the Madalena Islands.

At the end of July the *Victory*, having been returned to the fleet by Cornwallis, again became Nelson's flagship. As to the ultimate destination of the Toulon fleet Nelson was in doubt; that it was to sail before long he felt convinced owing to the activity manifest in the harbours. He rightly judged Napoleon's character: "We know he is not very scrupulous in the honourable means of accomplishing his darling object. . . . My firm opinion is, that the Mediterranean will again be an active scene; and if Ministers do not look out, I shall have the Brest fleet to pay me a visit; for as the army can only be moved by the protection of a superior fleet, that fleet they will try to have, and a month's start of us would do all the mischief." At that time (July) he believed that Napoleon would make an attempt on the Morea, perhaps in concert with Russia, the downfall of the Turkish Empire in Europe would follow, and "Candia and Egypt would, of course, if this plan is followed, be given to the French, when, sooner or later, farewell India!" Of the enormous flotilla which Napoleon was building at Boulogne and elsewhere,

Nelson thought little, if at all. "What! he begins to find excuses!" he writes to Ball. "I thought he would invade England in the face of the sun! Now he wants a three-days' fog, that never yet happened! and if it did, how are his craft to be kept together? He will soon find more excuses or there will be an end of Bonaparte, and may the devil take him!" He was more concerned, and with reason, as to the whereabouts of the fleet returning from San Domingo, which he thought would "come to the Mediterranean—perhaps, first to Cadiz, to get the Spaniards to escort them. If so, I may have two fleets to fight; but if I have the ships, the more the merrier." In August the Admiral tells Addington: "I am looking out for the French squadron—perhaps you may think impatiently; but I have made up my mind never to go into port till after the battle, if they make me wait a year, provided the Admiralty change the ships, who cannot keep the sea in the winter, except *Victory*, *Canopus*, *Donegal*, and *Belleisle*." The sitting out of an expedition at Marseilles led Nelson to think that the invasion of Sardinia was contemplated. He therefore detached the only two frigates he had with him at the moment to cruise off Ajaccio to endeavour to intercept the enemy should they come that way. "Of course they will say that we have broken the neutrality if we attack them in the ports of Sardinia before their conquest, and if we do not I shall be laughed at for a fool. Prevention is better than cure. . . . My station to the westward of Toulon, an unusual one, has been taken upon an idea that the French fleet is bound out of the Straits, and probably to Ireland. It is said 10,000 men are collecting at Toulon. I shall follow them to the Antipodes."

To Sir Richard Strachan he thus sums up the situation on the 26th August: "The French fleet being perfectly ready for sea, seven of the line, six frigates, and some corvettes—two sail-of-the-line are now rigging in the arsenal—I think it more than probable that they are bound to the westward, out of the Mediterranean.

Therefore, as I am determined to follow them, go where they may, I wish you, in case they escape me, to send a frigate or sloop after them to find out their route, giving her a station where I may find her, and keep yourself either at the mouth of the Straits or off Europa Point, for I certainly shall not anchor at Gibraltar." In the middle of October he is still as uncertain as ever as to the destination of the French. Some folk favoured the Morea, others Egypt, "and they may be bound outside the Mediterranean." "Is it Ireland or the Levant?" he asks Ball in the early days of dreary November.

Think for one moment, as you sit reading this book in a comfortable room or on a little hillock in the open country, of the ceaseless vigil of Nelson as his weather-beaten vessels lay off Toulon. When a sea fog obscured his quarry he was in a fever of anxiety. "It was thick for two days," he tells his brother William on one occasion, "and our frigates could not look into Toulon; however, I was relieved, for the first time in my life, by being informed the French were still in port." Then there was always the possibility that the Brest fleet might escape and make its appearance at an awkward moment, and the likelihood of a visit from the returning squadron from the West Indies. He early discerned the outbreak of war with Spain. Pretending to be a neutral, that Power most assuredly exhibited the most flagrant favouritism for France. We have noted that Nelson anticipated the aid of the Dons to the French in the matter of the ships from San Domingo, help that was readily given when the vessels, evading Rear-admiral Campbell, stole into Coruña. This, of course, necessitated a strict blockade of the port, and Pellew was sent there instead of stationing himself off Rochefort as had been originally intended. References to them are frequent in his correspondence. Writing to the British Consul at Barcelona under date of the 13th September Nelson claimed "every indulgence which is shown to the ships of our enemies. The French squadron

at Coruña are acting almost as they please; the *Aigle* French ship of war is not turned out of Cadiz,<sup>1</sup> the French frigate *Revenge* is permitted to go out of that port, cruise, and return with prizes, and sell them. I will not state that every Spanish port is a home for French privateers, for this is well known; and I am informed that even at Barcelona English vessels captured by the French have been sold there. You will acquaint his Excellency [the Captain-general] that I claim for every British ship, or squadron, the right of lying as long as I please in the ports of Spain, whilst it is allowed to other powers; that I claim the rights of hospitality and civility, and every other right which the harmony subsisting between our sovereigns entitles us to." This communication was followed thirteen days later by a despatch to Strachan in which Nelson is not only prophetic, but exhibits a cautious mood not usually associated with "the Nelson whom Britons love." In this respect he has been much maligned. In battle his genius enabled him to see a little ahead of more ordinary men, but he never overstepped the bounds of prudence. "The occurrences which pass every day in Spain forebode, I fancy, a speedy war with England; therefore it becomes proper for me to put you upon your guard, and advise you how to act under particular circumstances. By looking at the former line of conduct on the part of Spain, which she followed just before the commencement of the last war, we may naturally expect the same events to happen. The French Admiral Richery was in Cadiz, blocked up by Admiral Man: on 22 August they came to sea attended by the Spanish fleet, which saw the French safe beyond St Vincent, and returned into Cadiz. Admiral Man very properly did not choose to attack Admiral Richery under such an escort. This is a prelude to what I must request your strict attention to; at the same time, I am fully aware that you must be guided, in some measure, by actual circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> The *Aigle* had taken refuge in Cadiz harbour.

"I think it very probable, even before Spain breaks with us, that they may send a ship or two of the line to see *l'Aigle* round Cape St Vincent; and that if you attack her in their presence, they may attack you; and giving them possession of the *Donegal* would be more than either you or I should wish, therefore I am certain it must be very comfortable for you to know my sentiments. From what you hear in Cadiz, you will judge how far you may venture yourself in company with a Spanish squadron; but if you are of opinion that you may trust yourself near them, keeping certainly out of gun-shot, send your boat with a letter to the Spanish commodore, and desire to know whether he means to defend the French ships; and get his answer in writing, and have it as plain as possible. If it be 'yes, that he will fire at you if you attack the French under his protection,' then, if you have force enough, make your attack on the whole body, and take them all if you can, for I should consider such an answer as a perfect declaration of war. If you are too weak for such an attack, you must desist; but you certainly are fully authorised to take the ships of Spain whenever you meet them. Should the answer be ambiguous, you must then act as your judgment may direct you, and I am sure that will be very proper. Only recollect, that it would be much better to let the French ships escape, than to run too great a risk of losing the *Donegal*, yourself, and ship's company." To Addington he states that "The Spaniards are now so very uncivil to our ships, that I suppose we shall not be much longer friends." To John Hookham Frere, *Chargé d'Affaires* at Madrid, he admits, "We have given up French vessels taken within gun-shot of the Spanish shore, and yet French vessels are permitted to attack our ships from the Spanish shore. Your Excellency may assure the Spanish Government, that in whatever place the Spaniards allow the French to attack us, in that place I shall order the French to be attacked. The old order of 1771, now put in force against us, is infamous; and

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I trust your Excellency will take proper steps that the present mode of enforcing it be done away. It is gross partiality, and not neutrality."

There is a pathetic letter dated the 12th December 1803 in which Nelson confides to his old friend Davison some of the perils which he encountered daily. "My crazy fleet," he writes, "are getting in a very indifferent state, and others will soon follow. The finest ships in the service will soon be destroyed. I know well enough that if I was to go into Malta, I should save the ships during this bad season. But if I am to watch the French, I must be at sea, and if at sea, must have bad weather; and if the ships are not fit to stand bad weather, they are useless. . . . But my time of service is nearly over. A natural anxiety, of course, must attend my station; but, my dear friend, my eyesight fails me most dreadfully. I firmly believe that, in a very few years, I shall be stone-blind. It is this only, of all my maladies, that makes me unhappy; but God's will be done."

Nelson had taken up his station "to the westward of Sicie," a position enabling him "to prevent the junction of a Spanish fleet from the westward," and also "to take shelter in a few hours either under the Hières Islands or Cape St Sebastian; and I have hitherto found the advantage of the position. Now Spain, having settled her neutrality"—he is writing on the 12th December to Lord St Vincent—"I am taking my winter's station under St Sebastian, to avoid the heavy seas in the gulf, and keep frigates off Toulon. From September we have experienced such a series of bad weather that is rarely met with, and I am sorry to say that all the ships which have been from England in the late war severely feel it. . . . I know no way of watching the enemy but to be at sea, and therefore good ships are necessary." On the same day he informs a third correspondent that the enemy at Toulon "are perfectly ready to put to sea, and they must soon come out, but who shall [say] where they

are bound? My opinion is, certainly out of the Mediterranean."

"We have had a most terrible winter: it has almost knocked me up," he tells Elliot within a few days of the close of this anxious year. "I have been very ill, and am now far from recovered, but I hope to hold out till the battle is over, when I must recruit myself for some future exertion."

An Indomitable Spirit this, the greatest sailor of all time!

## CHAPTER XVIII

# Twelve weary Months in the Mediterranean

(1804)

*"My wish is to make a grand coup."*  
NELSON.

A NEW year had dawned. "The storm is brewing," Nelson wrote, and he thought Sardinia "one of the objects of its violence." If that island were captured or ceded to the enemy, "Sicily, Malta, Egypt, &c., &c., is lost, sooner or later." The Madalena Islands, to the north of Sardinia, not only afforded the ships a safe anchorage but ensured plenty of fresh water and provisions: "Sardinia is the most important post in the Mediterranean. It covers Naples, Sicily, Malta, Egypt, and all the Turkish dominions; it blockades Toulon; the wind which would carry a French fleet to the westward is fair from Sardinia; and Madalena is the most important station in this most important island. I am told that the revenues, after paying the expenses of the island, do not give the king 5000 l. sterling a year. If it is so, I would give him 500,000 l. to cede it, which would give him 25,000 l. a year for ever. This is only my conversation, and not to be noticed—but the king cannot long hold Sardinia." On the 11th February 1804 he assures "my dear friend" Ball that "we are . . . on the eve of great events; the sooner they come the better." Private letters led him to believe



that the squadrons at Brest and Ferrol were to form a junction with that at Toulon. Should his surmise prove correct he inferred an invasion of both the Morea and Egypt, a belief fostered by the wily Napoleon by means of a camp under General St Cyr at Taranto, in the heel of Italy.

Nelson communicated his notions to the Grand Vizier. "Your Highness," he adds, "knows them too well to put any confidence in what they say. Bonaparte's tongue is that of a serpent oiled. Nothing shall be wanting on my part to frustrate the designs of this common disturber of the human race."

He pens a little grumble to Dr Moseley in March, complaining that the Mediterranean fleet seems "forgotten by the great folks at home," but adding with pardonable pride that although the vessels have been at sea a week short of ten months, "not a ship has been refitted or recruited, excepting what has been done at sea. You will readily believe that all this must have shaken me. My sight is getting very bad, but I must not be sick until after the French fleet is taken." He includes some facts regarding his manifold interests as Commander-in-chief. He always had good mutton for invalids, gave half the allowance of grog instead of all wine in winter, changed the cruising ground so as not to allow "the sameness of prospect to satiate the mind," obtained onions, "the best thing that can be given to seamen," by sending a ship for them to Corsica, and always had "plenty of fresh water." In the stirring days of the first decade of the nineteenth century a British Admiral was in very truth "shepherd of his flock." He thought for the men and their officers, saw to their creature comforts, even provided amusement for them. Moreover, he had to be a diplomatist, something of a soldier, and a man of resource and reliance. The sailors of England alone made invasion impossible and nullified the superhuman efforts of the greatest soldier of recorded history to subjugate the Island Kingdom. Unpreparedness is peculiarly characteristic

of British policy. It will not surprise students to be told at the beginning of 1804 there were ten fewer sail-of-the-line than had been available before the Peace of Amiens. Weight of brain has won more battles than weight of metal, although it is safer and wiser to have a preponderating supply of both. We shall see what a dearth of frigates, which are "the eyes of a fleet," to use Nelson's apt expression, meant to the Admiral in the prelude to the Trafalgar campaign. He was already complaining of their absence.

La Touche Tréville was now in command at Toulon. Nelson disliked the man as sincerely as he loathed the nation whom he represented; he could "never trust a Corsican or a Frenchman." La Touche Tréville had been commodore, it will be remembered, of the Boulogne flotilla when Nelson had made his abortive attacks on it. These were lauded all over France as "glorious contests." Nelson was what is usually called, by a strange misnomer, "a good hater." Thus to duty was added a personal rivalry that filled him with an ardent longing to "get even" with his antagonist.

Napoleon had now a sufficient number of small boats at Boulogne and neighbouring ports for the conveyance of his 180,000 troops to England. He had abandoned his original plan and was determined that the Navy proper should play an important part in the perilous project. The Toulon fleet, after releasing the French *l'Aigle* at Cadiz, was to be joined by five ships off Rochefort under Villeneuve, and then hasten to Boulogne to convoy the flotilla. The rôle of the squadron at Brest was to be passive, although reports were spread far and wide that the ships there were to take an army to Ireland. This was done so that Cornwallis, blockading that port, might not form a junction with the squadron in the Downs for the purpose of opposing the crossing of the vast armament from the northern seaport. If all these combinations were successfully carried out Napoleon would have sixteen sail-of-the-

line ready for the master-stroke. Everything depended on whether the English blockading squadrons off Toulon, Cadiz, Rochefort, and in the Downs could be eluded.

On the 8th April Nelson again wrote, "We are on the eve of great events," and proceeded to tell his correspondent that two sail-of-the-line had "put their heads outside Toulon," and a little later "they all came out. We have had a gale of wind and calm since ; therefore I do not know whether they are returned to port or have kept the sea. I have only to wish to get alongside of them with the present fleet under my command ; so highly officered and manned, the event ought not to be doubted."

"If we go on playing out and in, we shall some day get at them," he tells Frere.

Monsieur La Touche was merely exercising his ships ; the time for the grand coup was not yet come. Nelson's opinion now was that the Brest fleet and a squadron he does not name, but probably that at Rochefort, were destined for the Mediterranean "either before or after they may have thrown their cargo of troops on shore in Ireland. Egypt and the Morea supposed to be their next object after their English and Irish schemes." On the 24th May the French made a further excursion, five sail-of-the-line, three frigates, and several smaller vessels came out of the harbour, which was being watched by a small squadron under Rear-Admiral Campbell. Nelson did not believe in showing the whole of his available resources to the enemy. By being out of sight he hoped to entice the enemy to leave their safe anchorage : "My system is the very contrary of blockading." He was delighted that Campbell did not allow the French to bring him to action with the small resources at his disposal, which is another example of Nelson's cautious methods. He thanked the admiral by letter, and concluded by saying, "I have no doubt but an opportunity will offer of giving them fair battle."

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Nelson continued to complain of ill health. "A sort of rheumatic fever," "blood gushing up the left side of my head, and the moment it covers the brain, I am fast asleep," a "violent pain in my side, and night-sweats"—this is his condition as he diagnosed it to Dr Baird on the 30th May. A week later he is buoyant at the thought of battle: "Some happy day I expect to see his (La Touche Tréville's) eight sail, which are in the outer road, come out; and if he will get abreast of Porquerolle, I will try what stuff he is made of; therefore you see I have no occasion to be fretful; on the contrary, I am full of hopes, and command a fleet which never gives me an uneasy moment."

Eight French sail-of-the-line, accompanied by half a dozen frigates, made an excursion on the 14th June, and Campbell was again chased. The latter sailed towards the main fleet, but La Touche Tréville was by no means anxious to try conclusions with his old enemy. After sailing about four leagues, he crept back to safer quarters. The British Admiral afterwards referred to this little excursion as a "caper." "I was off with five ships-of-the-line," he adds, "and brought to for his attack, although I did not believe that anything was meant serious, but merely a gasconade." With this conclusion La Touche Tréville begged to differ. He saw in the "caper" a bold manœuvre and an excellent opportunity for currying favour in the eyes of his exacting chief, who by no means overrated the commander's abilities. His despatch to Napoleon runs as follows: <sup>1</sup>

"I have the honour to give you an account of the *sortie* of the whole of the squadron under my orders. Having been advised that several English privateers were infesting the coast and the Islands of Hyères, I gave orders, three days ago, to the frigates *Incorruptible* and *Siren* and the brig *Ferret* to proceed to the Bay of

<sup>1</sup> The despatch is quoted in French by Professor Sir W. Knox Laughton in his edition of Sir N. Harris Nicolas's great work (pp. 364-5).

Hyères. The Easterly wind being against them they anchored under the Castle of Porquerolles. Yesterday morning the enemy became aware of their presence. Towards noon they detached two frigates and another vessel, which entered by the broad passage with the intention of cutting off the retreat of our frigates. As soon as I saw this manœuvre I signalled to the whole squadron to make sail, and this was done. In fourteen minutes all were under sail and I made for the enemy in order to cut him off from the narrow passage and to follow him up if he attempted it. But the English Admiral soon gave up his design, recalled his vessel and his two frigates engaged amongst the Islands and took to flight. I pursued him till nightfall; he was heading for the S.E. At daybreak I had lost sight of him."

When Nelson heard of this communication he was furious. "You will have seen his letter of how he chased me and how I ran," he tells his brother, the Rev. W. Nelson. "I keep it; and, by —, if I take him he shall eat it!"

Nelson continued to fear the loss of Sardinia, which "will be great indeed." In this matter he was wrong, for Napoleon entertained no idea of conquest in that direction. There was every indication, on the other hand, that he might do so, and the Admiral is not to be blamed but praised for his zeal in behalf of the island which meant so much to the fleet under his command. When he heard that Vice-Admiral Ganteaume had hoisted his flag at Brest he was sure that an attempt would be made to reach the Mediterranean. "The French navy is daily increasing, both at Toulon and Brest, whilst ours is as clearly going down-hill," is Nelson's summing-up of the situation in the early days of July 1804. He then pours out the vials of his wrath on Addington's administration because it had not taken sufficiently to heart the old adage, "in times of peace prepare for war": "We made use of the peace, not to recruit our navy, but to be the cause of its ruin. Nothing but a speedy battle, a

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complete annihilation of the enemy's fleets, and a seven years' peace, can get our fleet in the order it ought to be; therefore I, for one, do not wish to be shackled with allies. I am for assisting Europe to the utmost of my power, but no treaties, which England only keeps." This was with reference to a suggested treaty with Russia: "Such alliances have never benefited our country." Europe, he says, is "degenerate." A month later he refers to his "shattered carcass," which "requires rest." Then he bows to Fate, says he submits, and states that all his wishes "now rest that I may meet Monsieur La Touche before October is over."

La Touche Tréville died on the 18th August 1804. He was buried on Cape Sepet, his successor, Villeneuve, making a funeral oration. Unaware that his enemy was vanquished, we find Nelson writing on the 19th that "Such a liar is below my notice, except to thrash him, which will be done," if in his power. "I never heard of his acting otherwise than as a poltroon and a liar," is another of his remarks, which scarcely soften when he heard the "miscreant" was in his coffin: "La Touche has given me the slip—he died of the colic; perhaps Bonaparte's, for they say he was a rank republican." With misplaced humour the French press asserted that the Admiral had died of over-exertion due to "walking so often up to the signal-post upon Sepet to watch the British fleet."

War with Spain, which Nelson had predicted, was formally declared by that Power on the 12th December 1804. Napoleon had already exacted a handsome annual sum from her treasury, a matter overlooked by the British Government for reasons of policy. When he secured the assistance of the Spanish navy, Pitt, who was again in office, refused to be hoodwinked, and warned the traitorous neutrals. As this was unheeded, four frigates, two of which belonged to Nelson's fleet, were sent to intercept four treasure ships from South America off Cadiz. The two forces came in sight on the 5th October. Although the

Spanish vessels were not prepared to fight, an action took place consequent on the commander refusing to surrender. The Spanish *Mercedes* blew up, and the others were seized as prizes. A declaration of war, prompted by Napoleon, was the result. The ruler of France was playing into his own hands with his usual unscrupulous skill.

The command off Cadiz had now been given to Sir John Orde. Nelson, quite naturally, did not approve this apportioning out of what he regarded as his own preserves. "I almost begin to think," he says, with reference to Orde, "that he is sent off Cadiz to reap the golden harvest, as Campbell was sent off Cadiz by Cornwallis (by orders from England) to reap my sugar harvest. It's very odd, two Admiralties to treat me so: surely I have dreamt that I have 'done the State some service.' But never mind; I am superior to those who could treat me so. When am I to be relieved?"

Not yet! There was much to do and darker days to be lived through before the Master Mariner could sleep peacefully ashore.

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Crisis

(1805)

*"We know the success of a man's measures is the criterion by which we judge of the wisdom or folly of his measures. I have done my best."*

NELSON.

NAPOLEON had now completed further plans. These he fondly hoped would lead to the downfall of British rule in the United Kingdom and the eventual dismemberment of the Empire. His strategy, if somewhat involved, was deeply laid. Instead of concentrating his fleet in European waters, that very essential part of the programme was to be undertaken in the Atlantic. By means of feints and false intelligence it was anticipated that Nelson would again suppose that the East was the destination of the French armament. Again much depended on whether Napoleon's commanders at Rochefort and Toulon would prove sufficiently clever to elude the blockading squadrons and to carry out the subsequent junction. The former was to make for Martinique, the latter for Cayenne. Having spread ruin and disaster in the British West Indies, they were to unite, release the squadron at Ferrol, and return to Rochefort to threaten Cornwallis, who would thus be precluded from lending assistance elsewhere. Ganteaume at Brest was to play the chief part. He was to make a descent on Ireland while his colleagues were crossing the Atlantic and then cover the invading army from Boulogne.

On the 11th January 1805 Missiessy, in command



at Rochefort, made good his escape, and eventually reached the West Indies. A week after his colleague had left port Villeneuve was also at sea. The great war game had begun. "Our frigates saw part of them all day, and were chased by some of the ships," Nelson informs Sir John Acton. The Admiral received the report of the enemy's sailing at Madalena at 3 P.M. on the 19th. Three hours later "the whole fleet was at sea," steering for the south end of Sardinia, "where I could have little fear but that I should meet them; for, from all I have heard from the captains of the frigates, the enemy must be bound round the south end of Sardinia, but whether to Cagliari, Sicily, the Morea, or Egypt, I am most completely in ignorance." He warns Acton to be on his guard for Sicily and to send information to Naples. On the 21st a French frigate was discerned off the south end of Sardinia, but became lost in the fog, and a little later Nelson heard that one of the French sail-of-the-line had put in at Ajaccio in a distressed condition. On the 27th he was off Palermo. "One of two things must have happened," he conjectures, "that either the French fleet must have put back crippled, or that they are gone to the eastward, probably to Egypt, therefore I find no difficulty in pursuing the line of conduct I have adopted. If the enemy have put back crippled, I could never overtake them, and therefore I can do no harm in going to the eastward; and if the enemy are gone to the eastward, I am right." He sent vessels to call at Elba, San Fiorenzo, Malta, Tunis, Pantellaria, Toro and other places to obtain information. He believed that eleven sail-of-the-line and nine smaller vessels were at sea. "I shall only hope to fall in with them."

On the 11th February Nelson was still in "total ignorance" regarding the whereabouts of the French fleet, but was more than ever confirmed in his opinion that Egypt was its destination. He had set off for the Morea, and then proceeded to Egypt, but the

enemy had eluded him. It was not until he arrived off Malta on the 19th that he received authentic information that the Toulon fleet had put back to port "in a very crippled state." He himself was able to report that the health of his men was excellent, and "although we have experienced a great deal of bad weather, have received no damage, and not a yard or mast sprung or crippled, or scarcely a sail split." "I have consulted no man," he had written to Lord Melville on the anniversary of the battle of Cape St Vincent, "therefore the whole blame in forming my judgment must rest with me. I would allow no man to take from me an atom of my glory had I fallen in with the French fleet, nor do I desire any man to partake of any of the responsibility—all is mine, right or wrong."

Misfortune had dogged Villeneuve almost from the moment he had left Toulon. After encountering a gale in the Gulf of Lyons his ships were in such a pitiful state that there was no alternative but to return. He complained bitterly, and not without reason, to the Minister of Marine about the wretched condition of the fleet at his disposal. The vessels, according to his report, were built of superannuated or bad materials, and lost masts or sails "at every puff of wind." In addition they were short-handed, the sailors were inexperienced, and the decks were encumbered with troops. Napoleon, who never appreciated the many difficulties of navigation, let alone of naval warfare, entertained the notion that the Navy could be run with practically as much precision as the Army; conditions of weather he almost contemptuously dismissed as of little account. He abruptly tells Villeneuve the plain unvarnished truth, namely that the great evil of the service "is that the men who command it are unused to all the risks of command." Almost in despair he asks, "What is to be done with admirals who allow their spirits to sink, and determine to hasten home at the first damage they may receive?"

Villeneuve was not a courageous commander. He hated taking risks. It may be that he realised his own personal limitations to some extent; it is certain that he fully appreciated those of his men and of his ships. The only training-place for sailors is the sea, and such excursions as had been made were as nothing compared to the daily encounters with storm, wind and tide which fell to the lot of the blockading squadron below the horizon.

Such obvious facts appealed to that sense of grim humour which is so essentially characteristic of Nelson. He thoroughly enjoyed his adversary's discomfiture, and poked fun at Napoleon, his men and his methods, on every possible occasion. "Bonaparte," he writes to Collingwood on the 13th March, "has often made his brags that our fleet would be worn out by keeping the sea; that his was kept in order and increasing by staying in port; but he now finds, I fancy, if *Emperors* hear truth, that his fleet suffers more in one night than ours in a year."

Napoleon, now the Imperial Incarnation of the Revolution, for he had crowned himself Emperor of the French on the 2nd December 1804, was not to be thwarted because his subordinates had failed to bring his giant schemes to a successful issue on two distinct occasions. He was obsessed by a desire to "leap the ditch." To humble that Island Power which was ever in his way, to strike at the very heart of that England whose wealth was lavished in fostering coalition after coalition, were now his fondest hopes. He thought, talked, and wrote of little else.

While his third plan was more involved than the others, it had the advantage of calling a greater number of ships into service. Villeneuve was to start from Toulon with eleven ships, release the Spanish squadron of six sail-of-the-line under the command of Admiral Gravina, and one French ship, at Cadiz, and then make for Martinique, where he would find Missiessy's squadron of five sail. In a similar manner the twenty-one ships

of Ganteaume's fleet at Brest were to rally Gourdon's fifteen vessels at Ferrol and also proceed to the West Indies. Thus no fewer than fifty-nine sail and many smaller vessels would be congregated for the final effort. While Nelson was searching for them, this immense armament, with Ganteaume in supreme command, would recross the Atlantic, appear off Boulogne, and convoy the flotilla to England. It is unnecessary to give the alternative plans furnished to the admirals. To do so would only tend to involve the broad outline of the manœuvre as detailed above and serve no essential purpose.

Spurred on by Napoleon's displeasure, Villeneuve put to sea on the night of the 30th March 1805, and was sighted "with all sail set" by two British frigates on the following morning. It was not until the 4th April that Nelson, then off Toro, received this useful if vague intelligence, for the frigate which had followed in the tracks of the Toulon fleet had lost sight of the enemy. Her captain "thinks they either bore away to the eastward or steered S.S.W., as they were going when first seen," Nelson informs the Admiralty. He "covered the Channel from Barbary to Toro with frigates and the fleet" in the hope of discovering them or obtaining reliable information as to their whereabouts. On the 18th April he says, "I am going out of the Mediterranean after the French fleet. It may be thought that I have protected too well Sardinia, Naples, Sicily, the Morea, and Egypt, from the French; but I feel I have done right, and am therefore easy about any fate which may await me for having missed the French fleet. I have left five frigates, besides the sloops, &c., stationed at Malta for the present service of the Mediterranean, and with the Neapolitan squadron will, of course, be fully able to prevent any force the French have left to convoy troops to Sicily."

Nelson only succeeded in making sixty-five leagues in nine days "owing to very bad weather." It was not until the 18th April, when Villeneuve had been at

sea nearly three weeks, that he had news of the enemy having passed through the Straits on the 8th. "I am proceeding with the fleet under my command as expeditiously as possible to the westward in pursuit of them." Sir John Orde had so far forgotten or neglected his duty that when Villeneuve made his appearance at Cadiz the commander of the blockading squadron made off without either sending word to Nelson or leaving a frigate to keep in touch with the enemy. Consequently Nelson was still uncertain as to their destination. "The circumstance of their having taken the Spanish ships which were [ready] for sea from Cadiz, satisfies my mind that they are not bound to the West Indies (nor probably the Brazils); but intend forming a junction with the squadron at Ferrol, and pushing direct for Ireland or Brest, as I believe the French have troops on board." When off Tetuan on the 4th May he rightly observes, "I cannot very properly run to the West Indies without something beyond mere surmise; and if I defer my departure, Jamaica may be lost. Indeed, as they have a month's start of me, I see no prospect of getting out time enough to prevent much mischief from being done." Gibraltar Bay was reached on the 6th May, and at 6 P.M., Nelson was making his way through the Gut owing to there being "every appearance of a Levanter coming on." Off Cape St Vincent he hoped to be met by a frigate from Orde with intelligence of the enemy's route and also by a frigate from Lisbon. "If nothing is heard of them from Lisbon or from the frigates I may find off Cape St Vincent, I shall probably think the rumours which are spread are true, that their destination is the West Indies, and in that case think it my duty to follow them, or to the Antipodes, should I believe that to be their destination. I shall detach a sloop of war to England from off the Cape, when my mind is made up from either information or the want of it."

Nelson's idea as to the destination of the allied fleet

was corroborated by Commodore Donald Campbell, a Scotsman who had entered the Portuguese navy. After clearing transports and taking on board sufficient provisions for five months, he set out from Lagos Bay with ten sail-of-the-line and a number of smaller craft on his long chase. "My lot is cast," he hurriedly informs Ball, "and I am going to the West Indies, where, although I am late, yet chance may have given them a bad passage and me a good one. I must hope the best."

Many minds, many opinions. What had become of the Allied fleet? Even more important, what had it accomplished? Such questions must have been ever present in the mind of Nelson and his officers. Everything about the enemy was so vague as almost to suggest a phantom fleet. "I still think Jamaica is their object," is Nelson's comment on the 27th of May when making for Barbadoes, "but many think Surinam or Trinidad; and Bayntun, that they will land their troops at the city of San Domingo. In short, everyone has an opinion, but it will soon be beyond doubt. Our passage, although not very quick, has been far from a bad one. They started from Cadiz thirty-one days before we did from St Vincent, and I think we shall gain fourteen days upon them in the passage; therefore they will only arrive seventeen days before us at Martinique, for I suppose them bound there. I shall not anchor at Barbadoes. . . . I have prayed Lord Seaforth to lay an embargo, that the French may not know of my approach, and thus again elude our vigilance. My mind is not altered that Egypt was their destination last January." Eight days later, when the fleet was in Carlisle Bay, Barbadoes, and Nelson's force had been augmented by the addition of two battleships under Cochrane, we are informed that "There is not a doubt in any of the admirals' or generals' minds, but that Tobago and Trinidad are the enemy's objects; and although I am anxious in the extreme to get at their eighteen sail-of-the-line, yet,

## The Story of Nelson

as Sir William Myers has offered to embark himself with 2000 troops, I cannot refuse such a handsome offer; and, with the blessing of God on a just cause, I see no cause to doubt of the annihilation of both the enemy's fleet and army."

It happened that the general had received a letter on the previous night from Brigadier-General Brereton, stationed at St Lucia, informing him that the enemy's fleet, "steering to the southward," had been reported as passing that island during the late hours of the 28th May. According to Brereton's supposition its destination "must be either Barbadoes or Trinidad."

Knowing full well that if the intelligence proved false it would lose him the French fleet, but having no alternative, Nelson set off for Tobago, where he learnt from the captain of an American vessel that his ship had been boarded by a French sail-of-the-line the day before. Then he received a signal from a passing ship that the enemy was at Trinidad, where he anchored on the 7th June. Another report came to land that on the 4th the enemy had been at Fort Royal and was likely to sail during the night for the attack of Grenada. He was at the latter island on the 9th, and heard that the enemy had not only passed Dominica three days before, "standing to the northward," but had been lucky enough to capture a convoy of ships laden with sugar. Nelson peeped in at Montserrat on the 11th; on the 18th the troops were being disembarked at St John's, Antigua, at which place the fleet had arrived the previous evening. "At noon I sailed in my pursuit of the enemy; and I do not yet despair of getting up with them before they arrive at Cadiz or Toulon, to which ports I think they are bound, or at least in time to prevent them from having a moment's superiority. I have no reason to blame Dame Fortune. If either General Brereton could not have wrote, or his look-out man had been blind, nothing could have prevented my fighting them on 6 June; but such information, and from such a quarter, close to the enemy, could not

be doubted." He had already sent a fast-sailing brig with despatches to the Admiralty informing them of the probable return of the combined fleet to Europe, although so late as the 18th July he was not sure that the enemy had not tricked him and gone to Jamaica. With commendable alacrity Admiral Stirling was told to form a junction with Sir Robert Calder off Ferrol, and to await the enemy, for the commander of the brig has sighted the quarry and was of opinion from the course they were making that the neighbourhood of Cape Finisterre was their desired haven. It has remained for two modern historians to point out that Nelson had discerned the likelihood of Ferrol as an anchorage for Villeneuve's fleet, and had forwarded a warning to the Admiral stationed off that port.<sup>1</sup>

On the date just mentioned Nelson joined Collingwood off Cadiz, but no accurate news awaited him. Indeed, the former pinned his faith to an attack on Ireland as the grand *finale* of Napoleon's naval manoeuvres. At Gibraltar the Admiral went on shore for the first time since the 16th June, 1803—over two years. From thence he proceeded to Cornwallis's station off Ushant, and received orders from the Admiral to sail with the *Victory* and the *Superb* for Spithead. He struck his flag on the 19th August 1805 and set off for Merton.

To what extent had Napoleon's plans succeeded? Villeneuve had reached Martinique on the 14th May, only to find that Missiessy had not awaited his coming according to instructions. Ganteaume was also unable to carry out his part of the plan, consequently Villeneuve was alone in the West Indies and might become Nelson's prey at any moment. The prospect did not please him. When he heard that the great British commander had not only arrived at Barbadoes but had been reinforced by Cochrane he set the bows of his ships in the direction of home, contrary to the Emperor's orders to wait for a stated period for Ganteaume's arrival.

<sup>1</sup> See Mahan's "Nelson," p. 661, and Laughton, P. 202.



So far from raiding the British West Indies, Villeneuve only succeeded in capturing the Diamond Rock at Martinique and Missiessy in taking Dominica, although the latter had reinforced the French colonies.

After a perilous voyage Villeneuve was approaching Ferrol in thick weather on the 22nd July when he came face to face with the squadron of fifteen battleships and four smaller vessels which had been sent by the Admiralty to await his coming. The action which followed was anything but decisive. The fleet Nelson had longed to annihilate was allowed to escape by Calder, whose only prizes were the Spanish *San Rafael* (84) and *El Firme* (74). After leaving three of his less seaworthy ships at Vigo, the French commander eventually reached Coruña.

Another Act of the great Atlantic Drama was over.

## CHAPTER XX

### Nelson's Last Command

(1805)

*"May the God of Battles crown my endeavours with success."*

NELSON.

IN the previous chapter we left Nelson at Portsmouth after having chased the enemy nearly seven thousand miles, and been absent from home twenty-seven months. When "England's darling" set foot on the landing-stage he received an immense ovation from the crowds of people who had assembled to show their appreciation of his services. "It is really quite affecting to see the wonder and admiration and love and respect of the whole world," writes Lord Minto, referring to a mob in Piccadilly a little later, "and the general expression of all these sentiments at once, from gentle and simple, the moment he is seen. It is beyond anything represented in a play or poem."

It was characteristic of the man that, before leaving his ship, he communicated with the Admiralty regarding the companies of the *Victory* and the *Superb*. He said they were in "most perfect health, and only require some vegetables and other refreshments to remove the scurvy." Nelson at once proceeded to Merton, where he lived in quiet retirement with Lady Hamilton, playing with their beloved Horatia, or having a mental tussle with the French as he walked the garden-paths for hours without noticing either the passing of time or the presence of fatigue. Perhaps he pondered over the irony of Fate in giving the allied fleet into the hands

of Calder, who had let the golden opportunity slip by him so easily, but more probably he wondered if the fickle goddess would yet allow him to break the yoke of Napoleon on the seas.

The Emperor had made a final effort to unite his scattered ships. When the combined fleet was on its way to Europe the blockades of Rochefort and Ferrol had been abandoned so that Calder might intercept the enemy. He was but partially successful, as already explained. The squadron of five sail-of-the-line at Rochefort, commanded by Allemand, Missiessy's successor, had taken advantage of the temporary absence of the British squadron and was making its way to Vigo, where there were three sail.<sup>1</sup> Villeneuve had put into Coruña with fifteen battle-ships, and found fourteen Spanish and French sail-of-the-line awaiting him. This brought the total of his available resources to thirty-four sail, provided all were united. If Villeneuve were able to join Ganteaume at Brest the number would be fifty-five. Cornwallis, with either thirty-four or thirty-five, was a dangerous menace, but when that commander detached eighteen sail to blockade Ferrol it did not seem insurmountable, even supposing that the five ships under Calder, then stationed off Rochefort, joined him, which they did on the 14th August. After considerable delay Villeneuve weighed anchor on the 18th August 1805, and hoped to reach Brest. He encountered bad weather, mistook Allemand's ships for the enemy's vessels, and, to make matters worse, was informed that a large British fleet was on the alert. With this he altered his course and put in at Cadiz a week later. Here he was watched by Collingwood with three sail-of-the-line and two smaller vessels, until the latter was reinforced by twenty-two battle-ships, four of which were under Sir Richard Bickerton and the remainder under Calder. When Napoleon heard of Villeneuve's retirement to Cadiz he knew that his gigantic exertions for the invasion of the United

<sup>1</sup> These were crippled ships detached by Villeneuve.

Kingdom had been completely shattered. With marvellous facility he shifted his horizon from the white cliffs of England to the wooded banks of the Danube. The so-called Army of England was marched from Boulogne to win fresh conquests in the Austerlitz Campaign and to crush yet another coalition.

At five o'clock on the morning of the 2nd September 1805, Captain Blackwood presented himself at Merton. "I am sure you bring me news of the French and Spanish fleets," Nelson exclaimed in his eager, boyish way, "and I think I shall yet have to beat them." Blackwood was the bearer of the important intelligence that Villeneuve, largely augmented, was at Cadiz. For a time it would appear as if Nelson hesitated, not on his own account but because of those whom he loved. His health was bad, he felt the country very restful after his trying cruise, and he disliked to give Lady Hamilton cause for further anxiety. He walked the "quarter-deck" in his garden weighing the pros with the cons, then set off for the Admiralty in Whitehall.

"I think I shall yet have to beat them." His mistress was apparently no less valiant, at least in her conversation. "Nelson," she is stated to have said, "however we may lament your absence, offer your services; they will be accepted, and you will gain a quiet heart by it; you will have a glorious victory, and then you may return here, and be happy."

Eleven days after Captain Blackwood's call Nelson left Merton for ever. It was a fearful wrench, but he was prepared to sacrifice everything to his King and his country. The following night he wrote in his Diary, little thinking that the outpourings of his spirit would ever be revealed in the lurid light of publicity, a prayer which shows very clearly that he had a premonition he would never open its pages again under the roof of Merton Place:

"May the great God, whom I adore, enable me to fulfil the expectations of my Country; and if it is His good pleasure that I should return, my thanks

will never cease being offered up to the Throne of His Mercy. If it is His good Providence to cut short my days upon earth, I bow with the greatest submission, relying that He will protect those so dear to me, that I may leave behind. His will be done. Amen, Amen, Amen."

The *Victory*, on which he hoisted his flag, had been hastily patched up and put in fighting trim. As her escort went the *Euryalus* frigate, joined later by the *Ajaax* and *Thunderer*.

Collingwood and Calder "sat tight" outside Cadiz harbour with one eye on the enemy and the other searching for signs of the British ships, for they had heard that Nelson would be with them ere long. Later, "my dear Coll" received further tidings by the *Euryalus* requesting that "not only no salute may take place, but also that no colours may be hoisted: for it is as well not to proclaim to the enemy every ship which may join the fleet." The supreme modesty of Nelson stands out clearly in the last words of the note: "I would not have any salute, even if you are out of sight of land."

The day before his forty-seventh birthday, Nelson hove in sight of Cadiz and assumed command. On the 29th the officers came to congratulate him. "The reception I met with on joining the fleet," he declares, "caused the sweetest sensation of my life. The officers who came on board to welcome my return, forgot my rank as Commander-in-chief in the enthusiasm with which they greeted me. As soon as these emotions were past, I laid before them the plan I had previously arranged for attacking the enemy; and it was not only my pleasure to find it generally approved, but clearly perceived and understood." Again: "Some shed tears, all approved," he writes, "it was new, it was singular, it was simple; and from Admirals downwards it was repeated, 'It must succeed if ever they will allow us to get at them! You are, my Lord, surrounded by friends whom you inspire with confidence.'"<sup>1</sup> In due course the complete plan of attack was issued.

<sup>1</sup> Mahan accepts this, but Laughton discredits it.

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On October 19th the signal, "The enemy are coming out of port," flew from the mastheads of the frigates stationed to watch the goings-on in the harbour. Thirty-three ships-of-the-line, with five frigates and two brigs, had passed out by the following day. They were certainly "painted ships," with their vividly-coloured hulls of red and black, yellow and black, and black and white. Their mission was to support Napoleon's army in the south of Italy.

Once at sea the combined fleet sailed in two divisions, as had been agreed upon by Villeneuve and Gravina, the commander of the Spanish vessels. The French Admiral's own squadron, the *Corps de bataille*, was made up of twenty-one sail-of-the-line, the centre under Villeneuve himself, the van under Alava, and the rear under Dumanoir. The *Corps de réserve*, or Squadron of Observation, consisted of twelve ships divided into two squadrons of equal strength, each commanded by Gravina and Magon respectively. The duty of the *Corps de réserve* was to watch the battle and to reinforce any weak point as opportunity occurred.

Nelson's force consisted of twenty-seven men-o'-war, four frigates, a schooner, and a cutter. The enemy, therefore, had the advantage as regards heavy ships, of six sail-of-the-line. In armament the combatants were nearly equal,<sup>1</sup> as in bravery and daring, but very inferior in seamanship and general *morale*. It was very necessary to prevent the enemy from entering the Mediterranean, as Napoleon's orders strictly enjoined them to do, therefore the signal was made for a "general chase S.E.," namely, towards the Straits of Gibraltar.

Napoleon had resolved to supersede Villeneuve by Rosily. This decision probably carried more weight with the French Admiral than any other, and had determined his course of action, although at a council of war, held before anchors were weighed, a resolution was passed to avoid an engagement with the British if possible. Of personal courage he had no lack,

<sup>1</sup> The total British broadside was 1000 lb. -

for he wrote to Decrès, the Minister of Marine, "if the French navy has been deficient in nothing but courage, as it is alleged, the Emperor shall soon be satisfied, and he may reckon upon the most splendid success." His great hope was that he might elude detection and land the troops he had on board at Naples. He was without faith in his ships.

Having seen that his orders were carried out, Nelson went to his cabin and began the last letter he was destined to write to Lady Hamilton. Here it is in full :

" *Victory*, October 19th 1805. Noon.

" CADIZ, E.S.E. 16 Leagues.

" MY DEAREST BELOVED EMMA, THE DEAR FRIEND OF MY BOSOM,—The signal has been made that the Enemy's Combined Fleet are coming out of Port. We have very little wind, so that I have no hopes of seeing them before to-morrow. May the God of Battles crown my endeavours with success ; at all events, I will take care that my name shall ever be most dear to you and Horatia, both of whom I love as much as my own life. And as my last writing before the Battle will be to you, so I hope in God that I shall live to finish my letter after the Battle. May Heaven bless you, prays your

" NELSON AND BRONTE.

" October 20th.—In the morning, we were close to the Mouth of the Straits, but the wind had not come far enough to the Westward to allow the Combined Fleets to weather the Shoals of Trafalgar ; but they were counted as far as forty Sail of Ships of War, which I suppose to be thirty-four of the Line, and six Frigates. A group of them was seen off the Lighthouse of Cadiz this morning, but it blows so very fresh and thick weather, that I rather believe they will go into the Harbour before night. May God Almighty give us success over these fellows, and enable us to get a Peace."

After Trafalgar had been fought and won, the above letter was found open on Nelson's desk.

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The 20th was cold, damp, and miserable, but the fleet had made good speed and was between Capes Trafalgar and Spartel. By noon the *Victory* was within eight or nine leagues of Cadiz.

Dr Beatty, surgeon of Nelson's flagship, thus records how the day was spent :

" At 8 o'clock in the morning of the 20th, the *Victory* hove to, and Admiral Collingwood, with the captains of the *Mars*, *Colossus*, and *Defence*, came on board to receive instructions from his Lordship: at eleven minutes past nine they returned to their respective ships, and the fleet made sail again to the Northward. In the afternoon the wind increased, and blew fresh from the S.W., which excited much apprehension on board the *Victory*, lest the enemy might be forced to return to port. The look-out ships, however, made several signals for seeing them, and to report their force and bearings. His Lordship was at that time on the poop; and turning round, and observing a group of midshipmen assembled together, he said to them with a smile, ' This day, or to-morrow, will be a fortunate one for you, young men,' alluding to their being promoted in the event of a victory. A little before sunset the *Euryalus* communicated intelligence by telegraph<sup>1</sup> that ' the enemy appeared determined to go to the Westward.' His Lordship, upon this, ordered it to be signified to Captain Blackwood by signal, that ' he depended on the *Euryalus* for keeping sight of the enemy during the night.' The night signals were so clearly and distinctly arranged by his Lordship, and so well understood by the respective Captains, that the enemy's motions continued to be known to him with the greatest facility throughout the night: a certain number of guns with false fires and blue lights, announcing their course, wearing and making or shortening sail; and signals communicating such changes were repeated by the look-out ships, from the *Euryalus* to the *Victory*."

<sup>1</sup> Not by telegraph as we understand it, but by semaphore.



## CHAPTER XXI

### The Rout in Trafalgar Bay

(1805)

*"Thank God, I have done my duty."*

NELSON.

THE 21st October 1805 is a red-letter day in the history of England. Dawn had scarcely succeeded night ere Nelson was up and doing. He wore his Admiral's frock-coat, the only decoration being four stars of different Orders which were pinned on his left breast. "In honour I gained them," he said, "and in honour I will die with them." He had not buckled on his sword, and this is the only action he fought without it.

The previous night Villeneuve had signalled for the columns of his fighting squadron to form in close line of battle without regard to priority of place, his former intention having been to give the three-deckers the more important positions. Captain Lucas of the *Redoubtable* states that the ships "were all widely scattered" in consequence of this order. "The ships of the battle squadron and those of the squadron of observation were all mixed up," although the commanders of the latter did their best to get into something approaching order.

Early the following morning—the glorious 21st—the French Admiral signalled to "clear for action!" and in response to the *Hermione's* message, "The enemy number twenty-seven sail-of-the-line," he ordered each ship to leave but one cable's length between its im-

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mediate neighbour. They were now on the starboard tack. Almost before these instructions had been completely carried out Villeneuve decided to alter their position, signalling them to form in line of battle on the port tack. The manœuvre was not easily effected. The wind was light, with a heavy swell, many ships missed their station, and there were several gaps and groups of ships along the line instead of vessels at regular intervals. The newly-formed line was consequently very irregular and almost crescent-shaped. Villeneuve, prudent to a fault, wished to have Cadiz harbour under his lee; he was apparently already lending his mind to thoughts of disaster.

Gravina, with the twelve reserve ships, seems to have pursued his own tactics. Instead of keeping to windward of the line, so that he might bring succour to Villeneuve if need should arise, the Vice-Admiral "moved to the rear to prolong the line"—now extending some five miles—"without having been signalled to do so." Whether Villeneuve took particular notice of this false move at the time is uncertain, but later, on his attempt to get his colleague to take up the position previously arranged for him and which would have enabled Gravina "to reinforce the centre of the line against the attack of the enemy," no attention was paid to the command. Never was there a more fatal error of policy. Had the Spanish Admiral been able to bring twelve ships to bear upon the battle when it was at its height he might have rendered valuable assistance.

Scarcely less reprehensible was the behaviour of Rear-Admiral Dumanoir Le Pelley, who with ten ships fell to leeward and formed a rear squadron.<sup>1</sup> Not until it was too late did he attempt to take any part in the battle.

The British fleet was formed into two columns, eleven ships following the *Victory* (100), and fourteen in the rear of the *Royal Sovereign* (100), under Collingwood. Nelson's idea was to bear down upon the enemy

<sup>1</sup> De la Gravière, p. 252.

with these two divisions and break the centre of the combined fleet in two places at once, Nelson leading the weather line, and Collingwood the lee. While Villeneuve was issuing his last order before the struggle, "Every ship which is not in action is not at its post," the British Commander-in-chief was committing to paper the following prayer :

"May the great God whom I worship grant to my country and for the benefit of Europe in general a great and glorious victory, and may no misconduct in anyone tarnish it ; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature in the British fleet ! For myself individually, I commit my life to Him that made me, and may His blessing alight on my endeavours for serving my country faithfully. To Him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted me to defend."

Nelson also made his will, heading it, "October 21st 1805, then in sight of the Combined Fleets of France and Spain, distant about ten miles." Blackwood and Hardy attached their signatures as witnesses. He left Emma, Lady Hamilton, "a legacy to my King and country, that they will give her an ample provision to maintain her rank in life. I also leave to the beneficence of my country my adopted daughter, Horatia Nelson Thompson ; and I desire she will use in future the name of Nelson only."

Blackwood had gone on board the flag-ship at six o'clock in the morning, and found the admiral "in good, but very calm spirits." He tells us in his "Memoirs" that "during the five hours and a half that I remained on board the *Victory*, in which I was not ten minutes from his side, he frequently asked me, 'What I should consider a victory ?' the certainty of which he never for an instant seemed to doubt, although, from the situation of the land, he questioned the possibility of the subsequent preservation of the prizes. My answer was, that considering the handsome way in which battle was offered by the enemy, their



Hoisting the Famous Signal  
C. M. Padday



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apparent determination for a fair trial of strength, and the proximity of the land, I thought if fourteen ships were captured, it would be a glorious result ; to which he always replied, 'I shall not, Blackwood, be satisfied with anything short of twenty.' A telegraphic signal had been made by him to denote, 'that he intended to break through the rear of the enemy's line, to prevent them getting into Cadiz.' I was walking with him on the poop, when he said, 'I'll now amuse the fleet with a signal ;' and he asked me 'if I did not think there was one yet wanting ?' I answered, that I thought the whole of the fleet seemed very clearly to understand what they were about, and to vie with each other who should first get nearest to the *Victory* or *Royal Sovereign*. These words were scarcely uttered, when his last well-known signal was made, 'ENGLAND EXPECTS EVERY MAN WILL DO HIS DUTY.' The shout with which it was received throughout the fleet was truly sublime. 'Now,' said Lord Nelson, 'I can do no more. We must trust to the Great Disposer of all events, and justice of our cause. I thank God for this great opportunity of doing my duty.'"

It has been pointed out that Blackwood is wrong in the matter of the cheer "throughout the fleet," for several of the crews were not informed as to the purport of the signal. The Admiral's first idea was to flag "Nelson confides that every man will do his duty." Captain Blackwood suggested "England" in place of "Nelson," which the Admiral told Pasco, the signal officer, to hoist, adding that he "must be quick" as he had "one more signal to make, which is for close action."

"Then, your Lordship," ventured Pasco, "if you will permit me to substitute 'expects' for 'confides' the signal can be more quickly completed, because we have 'expects' in the vocabulary, while 'confides' must be spelled." The code-book therefore won the day, and a message which has inspired the Navy for over a century was soon floating on the breeze.

In this connection there is a tradition that a Scottish sailor complained to a fellow-countryman: "Not a word o' puir auld Scotland." "Hoots, Sandy," answered his comrade, "the Admiral kens that every Scotsman will do his duty. He's just giving the Englishers a hint."

To continue Blackwood's narrative: "The wind was light from the S.W., and a long swell was setting into the Bay of Cadiz, so that our ships, like sovereigns of the ocean, moved majestically before it; every one crowding all the sail that was possible, and falling into her station according to her rate of going. The enemy wore at about seven o'clock, and then stood in a close line on the larboard tack towards Cadiz. At that time the sun shone bright on their sails; and from the number of three-deckers amongst them, they made a most formidable appearance; but this, so far from appalling our brave countrymen, induced them to observe to each other, 'what a fine sight those ships would make at Spithead.'<sup>1</sup> About ten o'clock, Lord Nelson's anxiety to close with the enemy became very apparent. He frequently remarked to me, that they put a good face upon it; but always quickly added, 'I'll give them such a dressing as they never had before,' regretting at the same time the vicinity of the land. At that critical moment I ventured to represent to his lordship the value of such a life as his, and particularly in the present battle; and I proposed hoisting his flag in the *Euryalus*, whence he could better see what was going on, as well as what to order in case of necessity. But he would not hear of it, and gave as his reason the force of example; and probably he was right."

A sailor who rejoiced in the nickname of Jack Nasty-Face gives us an excellent view of the proceedings as the sail-of-the-line were got ready for action: "During this time each ship was making the usual preparations, such as breaking away the captain and officers' cabins,

<sup>1</sup> Blackwood is, of course, generalising.

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and sending the lumber below—the doctors, parson, purser, and loblolly men were also busy, getting the medicine chests and bandages and sails prepared for the wounded to be placed on, that they might be dressed in rotation as they were taken down to the after-cockpit. In such bustling, and, it may be said, trying as well as serious time, it is curious to notice the different dispositions of the British sailor. Some would be offering a guinea for a glass of grog, while others were making a sort of mutual verbal will—such as, if one of Johnny Crapeau's shots (a term given to the French) knocks my head off, you will take all my effects; and if you are killed, and I am not, why, I will have yours; and this is generally agreed to. . . .”

Another intimate word-picture of what happened just before the contest of giants began is furnished by General Sir S. B. Ellis, K.C.B., who was a second lieutenant of Marines in the *Ajax*. “I was sent below with orders,” he writes, “and was much struck with the preparations made by the bluejackets, the majority of whom were stripped to the waist; a handkerchief was tightly bound round their heads and over the eyes, to deaden the noise of the cannon, many men being deaf for days after an action. The men were variously occupied; some were sharpening their cutlasses, others polishing the guns, as though an inspection were about to take place instead of a mortal combat, whilst three of four, as if in mere bravado, were dancing a hornpipe; but all seemed deeply anxious to come to close quarters with the enemy. Occasionally they would look out of the ports, and speculate as to the various ships of the enemy, many of which had been on former occasions engaged by our vessels.”

At about noon the first shot was fired. It came from the *Fougueux*, a French ship of 74 guns, under the command of Captain Louis Baudoin.

The *Royal Sovereign*, with the *Belleisle* (74), *Mars* (74), and *Tonnant* (80) just behind her, forged ahead. Nelson had signalled Collingwood to break the enemy's



line at the twelfth ship from the rear, but on seeing that she was only a two-decker Collingwood changed his course and steered straight for the *Santa Ana*, a huge Spanish ship of 112 guns, commanded by Vice-Admiral Alava. The *Fougueux* (74) then came up and endeavoured to prevent Collingwood from getting through the line. This caused the English Admiral to order his captain to make a target of the bowsprit of the Frenchman and steer straight for it. Fortunately for the enemy she altered her course, but although she saved herself she did not prevent the *Royal Sovereign* from breaking the line.

Collingwood was in his element; his usual silent ways gave place to enthusiasm. "What would Nelson give to be here!" he observed, the while his double-shotted guns were hurling death into the hold of his adversary and raking her fore and aft. A broadside and a half tore down the huge stern gallery of the *Santa Ana* (112), and killed and wounded a number of her crew, all of whom showed by deed and daring that they were worthy of their famous ancestors.

Both ships were soon in a pitiable condition, but they hugged each other in a last desperate struggle. A terrific cannonade ensued, the *Fougueux* and the *San Leandro* (64) raking the *Royal Sovereign*, and the *San Justo* (74) and *Indomptable* (80) lending their assistance some distance away, although it was difficult for them to distinguish between the two chief contestants, so dense was the smoke from the guns. Some fifteen or twenty minutes after Collingwood had maintained the unequal contest alone, several British ships came up and paid attention to those of the enemy which had gone to Alava's assistance. At about a quarter past two the mammoth *Santa Ana* struck her flag. On the captain delivering up his sword as deputy for the Vice-Admiral, who lay dreadfully wounded, he remarked that he thought the conquering vessel should be called the *Royal Devil*!

Nelson, steering two points more to the north than

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Collingwood, so as to cut off the enemy's way of retreat to Cadiz, came up about half an hour after the latter had begun his engagement. As the stately flagship entered the zone of fire a number of Villeneuve's vessels poured a perfect avalanche of shot upon her decks. Down went a score or more of brave fellows, the wheel was smashed, necessitating the ship being steered in the gun-room, and a topmast dropped on the deck from aloft. A shot struck one of the launches, a splinter tearing a buckle from one of the shoes of either Nelson or Hardy, which is not quite clear. "They both," writes Doctor Beatty, in his "Narrative," "instantly stopped, and were observed by the officers on deck to survey each other with inquiring looks, each supposing the other to be wounded. His Lordship then smiled and said, 'This is too warm work, Hardy, to last long'; and declared that, through all the battles he had been in, he had never witnessed more cool courage than was displayed by the *Victory's* crew on this occasion."

Steering for the *Santissima Trinidad* (180), at that time the biggest floating arsenal ever built in Europe, Nelson sought to engage her, but an alteration in position precluded this, and he tackled the *Bucentaure* (80), Villeneuve's flagship. The French Admiral was at last face to face with the man whose spirit had haunted him since he assumed command.

Crash went the 68-pounder carronade into the 80-gun Frenchman, and down came the greater part of the *Bucentaure's* stern. The *Victory* then grappled with the *Redoutable*, at the same time receiving a hurricane of fire from the French *Neptuno* (80).

Up in the fighting-tops of the *Redoutable* (74) were riflemen trying to pick off the officers of the *Victory*. One marksman, a little keener sighted or more fortunately placed than the others, saw Nelson walking up and down with Hardy. There was a flash of fire, a sharp crack as the bullet sped through the air, and

the master mariner of England, of the world, of all time, fell in a heap upon the deck.

The fatal ball entered his left shoulder by the edge of the epaulet, cut through the spine, and finally buried itself in the muscles of the back.

Three fellows rushed forward to his assistance.

"They have done for me at last, Hardy," he murmured, as they carried him below.

"I hope not," was the Captain's reply, not knowing the extent of Nelson's injuries, and probably thinking that it might be possible to remove the missile.

"Yes, my backbone is shot through," and then Nelson placed a handkerchief over his face that the crew might not know who formed the central figure of the solemn little procession. Some sailors on the *Santissima Trinidad*, however, could see from the stars on his coat that an important officer had fallen, and cheered.

They laid him in a midshipman's berth in the dimly-lit cockpit. He looked into the face of Death as he had looked into the face of the enemy, without flinching but not without hope. Sometimes a sentence would escape his lips. "Ah, Mr Beatty," he said to the surgeon, "you can do nothing for me; my back is shot through," and to Dr Scott, the chaplain, "Doctor, I am gone: I have to leave Lady Hamilton and my daughter Horatia as a legacy to my country."

Very little relief could be afforded him. He sipped lemonade frequently, his breast was rubbed, and constant fanning helped to soothe his agonies a little. Nelson sent for Hardy, whom he valued as an able officer and friend, but as the Captain could not leave his post at once the dying man feared for his safety. "Will no one bring Hardy to me? He must be killed! He is surely dead!"

The cheers of the British tars were borne down to the cockpit as often as an enemy's ship struck her flag, and a smile played over the pallid features. At last Hardy appeared and took his

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chief's hand. "How goes the day with us?" was the eager question.

"Very well, my Lord. We have taken twelve or fourteen ships; but five of their van have tacked and mean to bear down on us; but I have called two or three of our fresh ships round, and have no doubt of giving them a drubbing."

"I hope none of *our* ships have struck?" Nelson hastened to ask, seeing that Hardy was anxious to return to his post.

"There is no fear of that," was the reassuring answer.

Hardy, unable to restrain his tears, ascended the companion ladder. As the guns were fired into the passing squadron of Rear-Admiral Dumanoir, the ship shook violently, thereby causing the dying man intense agony. "Oh, *Victory, Victory*," he cried, "how you distract my poor brain," followed by "how dear is life to all men." Then his wandering thoughts turned homeward, and the memory of happy hours at Merton made him add, "Yet one would like to live a little longer, too." Hardy again entered the cockpit with the good news that fourteen or fifteen ships had struck. "That is well," Nelson breathed, "but I bargained for twenty. Anchor, Hardy, anchor." The Captain then asked whether Collingwood should not take the post of Commander-in-chief. The Admiral answered with all the force he could muster, "Not whilst I live, Hardy—no other man shall command whilst I live. Anchor, Hardy, anchor; if I live I'll anchor."

Nelson was sinking: the moment for taking his long farewell of his Captain had come. "Don't throw me overboard, Hardy. Take care of my dear Lady Hamilton; take care of poor Lady Hamilton. Kiss me, Hardy." As the sorrowful officer bent over him consciousness began to fade. "Who is that?" he asked. On being told that it was Hardy, he whispered, "God bless you, Hardy."

His life flickered like the candle fixed on the beam above, and then slowly went out. He murmured

that he wished he had not left the deck, that he had *not* been a *great* sinner, and said with deliberation, "Thank God, I have done my duty." "God and my country" were the last words heard by the sorrowful little group gathered round their beloved master. In the arms of Mr Walter Burke, the purser of the ship, Nelson lay dead.

And above, the heavy guns thundered a funeral dirge.

As we have already seen, the *Victory* was engaged in a duel with the *Redoutable* when Nelson received his death wound. For a short period the Frenchman did not return the fire, and thinking that Captain Lucas was about to surrender, the *Victory's* guns also kept silence. But the interval had been used for another purpose. The French crew were swarming over the bulwarks of the British flagship, climbing chains, and even clambering over the anchor in their attempt to get on board. A desperate resistance was offered, Captain Adair was killed by a musket ball, as well as eighteen marines and twenty seamen.

Help came from a sister ship. The *Téméraire* (98)—the fighting *Téméraire* of Turner's glorious picture—was now astern of the *Redoutable*. Had she possessed the machine guns of to-day she could hardly have swept the decks of the enemy with more deadly effect. The men who were attempting to board went down like ninepins. The carnage was awful; the sight sickening. When the smoke cleared, little heaps of corpses were seen piled up on the decks, while the bodies of other poor fellows floated on the sea, now tinged with the blood of victor and vanquished. Five hundred and twenty-two of the *Redoutable's* crew fell that day before she struck her colours.

The *Bucentaure* and the *Santissima Trinidad* were together throughout the battle and received a succession of attacks from various ships until they surrendered. Both of them were then little more than dismasted hulks. Villeneuve fought with the strength of despair,



Nelson and Collingwood cutting the Enemy's Lines at Trafalgar  
H. C. Seppings Wright



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but the case was hopeless, and resistance only prolonged the agony. No assistance came to him despite his frantic efforts to attract attention. "My part in the *Bucentaure* is finished!" he cried at last, and so the gallant but weak-willed officer was taken.

In appearance Villeneuve was "a tallish, thin man, a very tranquil, placid, English-looking Frenchman; he wore a long-tailed uniform coat, high and flat collar, corduroy pantaloons of a greenish colour, with stripes two inches wide, half-boots with sharp toes, and a watch-chain with long gold links."<sup>1</sup>

Other ships surrendered as the day wore on, the *Algéiras* (74) to the *Tonnant* (80), the *Swiftsure* (74) and the *Bahama* (74) to the *Colossus* (74), the *San Juan Nepomuceno* (74) to the *Dreadnought* (98). Eighteen ships of the Allied Fleet were captured; one, the *Achille* (74), blew up with a terrific explosion.

The *Victory* had been roughly handled by her adversaries. In Hardy's report of the 5th December 1805, he says:

"The hull is much damaged by shot in a number of different places, particularly in the wales, strings, and spurketing, and some between wind and water. Several beams, knees, and riders, shot through and broke; the starboard cathead shot away; the rails and timbers of the head and stem cut by shot, and the falling of the mizen-mast; the principal part of the bulkheads, halfports, and portsashes thrown overboard in clearing ship for action.

"The mizen-mast shot away about 9 feet above the deck; the main-mast shot through and sprung; the main-yard gone; the main-topmast and cap shot in different places and reefed; the main-topsail yard shot away; the foremast shot through in a number of different places, and is at present supported by a topmast, and a part of the topsail and crossjack yards; the fore-yard shot away; the bowsprit jibboom and cap shot, and the spritsail and spritsail topsail yards,

<sup>1</sup> "Seadrift," p. 253.



and flying jibboom gone; the fore and main-tops damaged; the whole of the spare topmast yards, handmast, and fishes in different places, and converted into jury geer.

"The ship makes in bad weather 12 inches water an hour."<sup>1</sup>

At five o'clock Gravina made the signal for retreat. What a sorry lot they were, those eleven ships—six Spanish and five French—which with their consorts had attempted to dethrone the Mistress of the Seas. Another four under the command of Dumanoir had also made good their escape, but only to be captured off Cape Ortegal on November 4th, by Sir Richard Strachan.

An eye-witness on board the *Belleisle* graphically describes the scene after the last shot had been fired: "The view of the fleet at this period was highly interesting, and would have formed a beautiful subject for a painter. Just under the setting rays were five or six dismantled prizes; on one hand lay the *Victory* with part of our fleet and prizes, and on the left hand the *Royal Sovereign* and a similar cluster of ships. To the northward, the remnant of the combined fleets was making for Cadiz. The *Achille*, with the tricoloured ensign still displayed, had burnt to the water's edge about a mile from us, and our tenders and boats were using every effort to save the brave fellows who had so gloriously defended her; but only two hundred and fifty were rescued, and she blew up with a tremendous explosion."

The battle was over, but much yet remained to be done. Eighteen sail-of-the-line of the Allied Fleet had struck their flag, and it was Collingwood's difficult task to secure the prizes. "A continued series of misfortunes," to use the Admiral's own words, ". . . of a kind that human prudence could not possibly provide against, or my skill prevent," alone precluded

<sup>1</sup> "The Three Dorset Captains at Trafalgar." By A. M. Broadley and R. G. Bartelot, M.A., p. 286.

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him from keeping more than four trophies of Trafalgar.

"On the 22nd, in the morning," he states in a despatch to the Admiralty, "a strong southerly wind blew, with squally weather, which, however, did not prevent the activity of the officers and seamen of such ships as were manageable from getting hold of many of the prizes (thirteen or fourteen), and towing them off to the westward, where I ordered them to rendezvous round the *Royal Sovereign*, in tow by the *Neptune*. But on the 28rd the gale increased, and the sea ran so high that many of them broke the tow-rope, and drifted far to leeward before they were got hold of again; and some of them, taking advantage of the dark and boisterous night, got before the wind, and have perhaps drifted upon the shore and sunk. On the afternoon of that day, the remnant of the combined fleet, ten sail of ships,<sup>1</sup> which had not been much engaged, stood up to leeward of my shattered and straggling charge, as if meaning to attack them, which obliged me to collect a force out of the least injured ships, and form to leeward for their defence. All this retarded the progress of the hulks; and the bad weather continuing, determined me to destroy all the leewardmost that could be cleared of the men, considering that keeping possession of the ships was a matter of little consequence, compared with the chance of their falling again into the hands of the enemy; but even this was an arduous task in the high sea which was running. I hope, however, it has been accomplished to a considerable extent. I intrusted it to skilful officers, who would spare no pains to execute what was possible. The Captains of the *Prince* and *Neptune* cleared the *Trinidad*, and sunk her. Captains Hope, Bayntun, and Malcolm, who joined the fleet this morning, from Gibraltar, had the charge of destroying four others. The *Redoubtable* sunk astern of the *Swiftsure*, while in tow. The *Santa Ana* I have no doubt is sunk, as her side is almost

<sup>1</sup> Eleven ships in all escaped into Cadiz.

entirely beat in; and such is the shattered condition of the whole of them, that, unless the weather moderates, I doubt whether I shall be able to carry a ship of them into port. . . ."

In a later letter Collingwood says, "There never was such a combat since England had a fleet." Three of the prizes, the *Santa Ana*, the *Neptuno*, and the *Algépiras* escaped in the gale and entered Cadiz harbour, the former two having been retaken by Cosmao Kerjulien, who lost three ships over the transaction. The *Swiftsure* (French), the *San Ildefonso*, the *San Juan Nepomuceno*, and the *Bahama* were the only Trafalgar prizes saved; these were taken to Gibraltar.

Villeneuve was sent to England and afterwards exchanged, Alava was fortunate enough to reach Cadiz on board the shattered *Santa Ana*. Although severely wounded, he recovered and lived for many years. Cisneros, after a gallant resistance, also escaped, and was promoted Vice-Admiral in return for his distinguished services, later taking up the important positions of Captain-General and Minister of Marine. Magon, who fought his flagship the *Algépiras* until he was struck dead after receiving several wounds, is one of the most glorious names in the naval annals of France. Three officers in turn were dangerously wounded before the tattered flag of the battered hulk was finally lowered. Of the other admirals, Cosmao retook the *Santa Ana* and the *Neptuno*, already noted, Dumanoir was court-martialled, and Gravina succumbed to his wounds as these words formed themselves on his almost nerveless lips: "I am a dying man, but I die happy; I am going, I hope and trust, to join Nelson, the greatest hero that the world perhaps has produced."<sup>1</sup> Escano was injured in the leg, but reached Spain safely. Napoleon's officers paid dearly for the fight in Trafalgar Bay, but Villeneuve was the scapegoat of Napoleon's ambition. On his return to France he took his own life.

<sup>1</sup> "Diary of the first Earl of Malmesbury," vol. iv., p. 354.

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Collingwood gave the number of prisoners as 20,000, and the monetary loss of the enemy nearly £4,000,000, "most of it gone to the bottom." The British loss was 1690 killed and wounded; that of the allies 5860, although no exact figures are obtainable. The captives were taken to England, and the officers allowed on parole, but the seamen and soldiers of the extinguished Allied Fleet were sent to the prisons of Porchester, Forton, Weedon, Norman Cross, Mill Bay, and Stapleton, locked up in local gaols, or interned in hulks. By a cruel fate the *Bahama* and the *Swiftsure* were added to the number of the latter. Few exchanges were made, and so the poor fellows either died in exile or remained until the downfall of Napoleon secured them liberty.

Thus ended the battle of Trafalgar—Napoleon's maritime Waterloo. The idea of a great military commander conducting operations at sea was proved to be impracticable, while the superior qualities of British seamanship were once more evident. The method of warfare practised by the combined fleet, that of aiming at the rigging and picking off combatants by sharp-shooting, was less successful than our own principle of aiming at the vital parts of the hull. Whereas the British succeeded in firing a gun nearly once a minute, it took three minutes for the Allied Fleet to do so. The total armament on the English vessels numbered 2148 guns, while the French had 1356, and the Spanish 1270, bringing the combined force to 2626.

Great Britain gained enormously in prestige as a result of Nelson's overwhelming victory. Amongst other important consequences Trafalgar led Napoleon to enforce his disastrous Continental System, by means of which he hoped to exclude from the Continent the goods of his persistent enemy. This, in its turn, brought on the war with Russia, a big step towards the final catastrophe of Waterloo.

More than two weeks passed before the people of England received certain intelligence of the great rout of the enemy in Trafalgar Bay. On the 6th November

1805, guns at the Tower and elsewhere announced the victory, and the glad tidings flashed through the length and breadth of the land—

*The heart of England throbbed from sea to sea.*

But, alas! the idol of the nation lay dead in the keeping of his comrades and sorrowing England could never again greet in life the son who had loved her so well.

Nelson had touched the imagination of high and low, and only the sad circumstance of an early death in the moment of glorious victory was wanted to ensure him the proudest place in all the long annals of British naval history.

Mr William Canton has written an exquisite poem<sup>1</sup> which well expresses the mingled feelings of elation and grief with which the nation received the great news. He imagines a "glittering autumn morning" in Chester, the Cathedral bells clashing a jubilant peal for the victory. But while yet the air is filled with the glad tongues of the joy-bells—

*Hark, in pauses of the revel—sole and slow—  
Old St Werburgh swung a heavy note of woe!  
Hark, between the jocund peals a single toll,  
Stern and muffled, marked the passing of a soul!  
English hearts were sad that day as sad could be;  
English eyes so filled with tears they scarce could see;  
And all the joy was dashed with grief in ancient Chester on the Dee!*

After Nelson's remains had been embalmed at Gibraltar they were conveyed in the *Victory* to Portsmouth, which was reached on the 2nd December 1805. In the early days of the New Year there was a lying-in-state in the beautiful Painted Hall of Greenwich Hospital, but comparatively few of the many thousands of people who wished to pay a last tribute of respect to the Admiral's memory were able to do so. The coffin, made out of the mainmast of the famous *l'Orient*

<sup>1</sup> *Trafalgar* in "W. V. Her Book and Various Verses."

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which blew up at the Nile, enclosed in an outer case, was then removed to the Admiralty, where it remained until the 9th January 1806, the day of the public funeral. The Prince of Wales, Dukes of the realm, prelates, statesmen, admirals, aristocrats and plebeians crowded into St Paul's Cathedral, a fitting shrine for the dust of the greatest sailor of the country—

*Whose flag has braved a thousand years  
The battle and the breeze.*

An Earldom was conferred upon the Rev. William Nelson, a large sum of money was voted by Parliament for the purchase of an estate to be named after Trafalgar, and certain monies were given to the dead Admiral's two sisters. By such means the country sought to discharge its heavy debt to the glorious memory of Nelson. Nothing was done for Lady Hamilton, and although, at the time of Nelson's death, her income amounted to about £2000 a year she died in very reduced circumstances at Calais in the year of Waterloo. Her daughter, and in all probability Nelson's, was married on the 24th February 1822 at Burnham, Norfolk, to the Rev. Phillip Ward, M.A. She is described as both witty and fascinating, and her portrait by Sir William Charles Ross makes one believe that she was so.

More than a century has passed since the great battle was fought "in Trafalgar's Bay," but the memory of the little, one-eyed, one-armed man is still treasured by those who believe, as he believed, that the strength of Great Britain rests upon her command of the sea.

*For he is England's admiral,  
Till setting of her sun.*

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